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121

Issue 121 | January 2016

Photoshop fundamentals

Brush up on your
Photoshop basics
with this guide to the
software's interface

plus

- The beauty of tragedy
- **Powerful game environments**
- Harmonious sci-fi design
- **and much more!**

Editor's Letter



ANNIE MOSS
Junior Editor

2dartist is now on Facebook!

Welcome to 2dartist issue 121!

Welcome to issue 121! *2dartist* is now 10 years old, so this month we've decided to take a look back at the sketchbooks of some of our favorite artists who have appeared in the magazine over the years. We also have a new feature starting this month, the Challenge gallery, a monthly competition where you can win a £60 voucher and have your work featured in the magazine!

This month's issue also features interviews with Bastien Lecouffe Deharme and Blake Rottinger and we see how Przemek Duda created his harmonious sci-fi world *Symbiont World*. We also have 10 more inspiring gallery images and tutorials on speed painting, Photoshop fundamentals, sci-fi compositions and painting a fantasy elf warrior. Enjoy!

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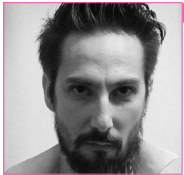
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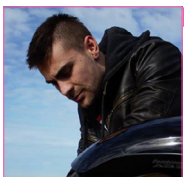
BASTIEN LECOUFFE DEHARME

Bastien Lecouffe Deharme is a French illustrator and digital painting instructor now based in the US. He has worked professionally since 2005 on numerous illustrations for books, magazines and games.



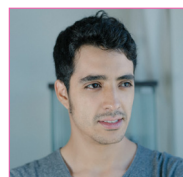
JUAN NOVELLETTO

Juan Novelletto is a senior concept artist at NGD Studios, developing the *Master of Orion* reboot, and art director at the indie games studio Nastycloud. He is based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



BLAKE ROTTINGER

Blake Rottinger is a concept artist in the entertainment industry specializing in environment design. He is based in Sydney, Australia and currently freelances for Crystal Dynamics game studio.



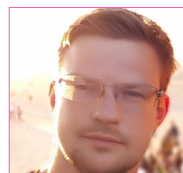
VICTOR MOSQUERA

Victor Mosquera is a Colombian concept artist living in Toronto, Canada. His clients include companies such as Ubisoft, Universal Music group, Volta, Tor.com and One Pixel Brush.



DANILO LOMBARDO

Danilo Lombardo is a self taught freelance 3D artist from Palermo, Italy. He works mainly on light and environment modeling but also designs vehicles and organic, or hard surface props.



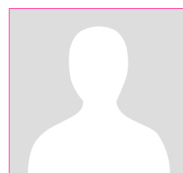
PRZEMEK DUDA

Concept and 3D artist Przemek Duda, based in Germany, started working for VFX companies after completing a degree in 2009. He creates characters and worlds for films and games.



WENDY YOON

Wendy Yoon is a freelance concept artist and illustrator from California, USA currently working in the film and games industry. She specializes in creating character, creature, and environment designs.



WOULD YOU LIKE TO SUBMIT TO 2DARTIST?

We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: annie@3dtotal.com.

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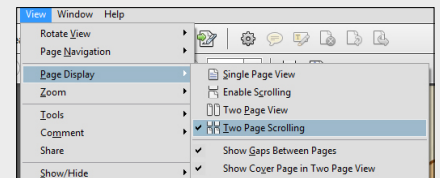
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Top tips for viewing

For optimum viewing of the magazine, it is recommended that you have the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. You can download it for free here: [DOWNLOAD](#)

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Jump to articles

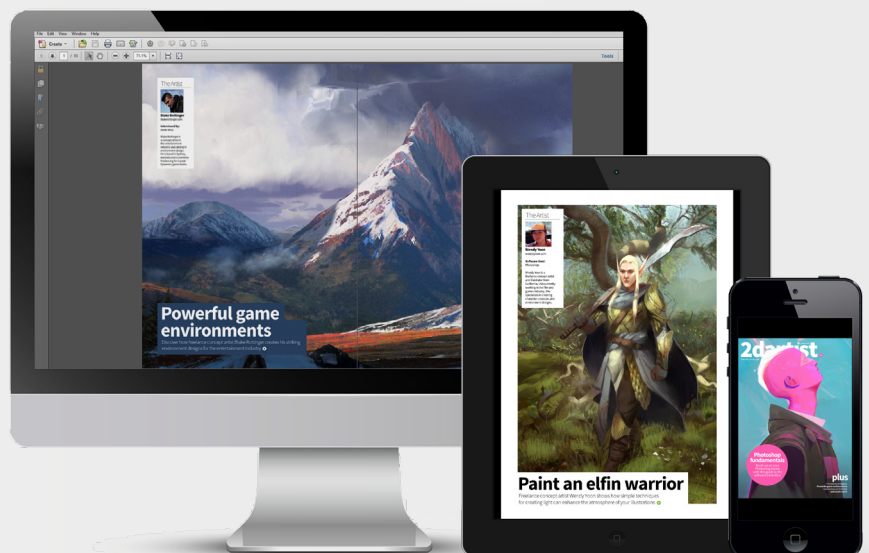
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The Artist



Bastien Lecouffe Deharme

deharme.com

Interviewed by:

Annie Moss

Bastien Lecouffe Deharme is a French illustrator and digital painting instructor now based in the US. He has worked professionally since 2005 on numerous illustrations for books, magazines and games.

**WARNING:
NUDITY**

The beauty of tragedy

Bastien Lecouffe Deharme explains how he has come to accept the 'dark' label attached to his works inspired by tragedy and flesh ▶

Bastien Lecouffe Deharme
WWW.ROMAN-NOIR.COM

For five hours a week Bastien Lecouffe Deharme sits with life drawing models and puts charcoal to paper, honing his traditional skills before embarking on his next digital project. It is this dedication to traditional methods, his perpetual return to what he considers the fundamentals of art, which Bastien attributes his distinctively traditional style of digital painting to. It allows him to maintain the passion for art which first brought him to a career as an artist, and in turn has been the motivating factor in his works since.

With a powerfully recognizable style, Bastien's work often takes on a dark tone which features elements of destruction or decay. The somber tone of his work is indicative of his preoccupation with the beauty of tragedy; an enduring theme inspired by significant moments in his life and the works of other notable artists and writers. In recent years he has worked with clients including Applibot, Random House, and numerous book, magazine and paper publications.

Bastien combines his freelance work with teaching digital art students at Shawnee State University, Ohio where he is a digital painting instructor. Looking back through his past works and techniques in order to explain them to others has been a learning process for Bastien which has impacted on his work. Five years after the release of his personal book project titled *Memories of Retrocity*, Bastien is now preparing to revise his work with the new skills he has acquired. This month Bastien talks to 2dartist magazine about his unusual work schedule, developing his work through practicing traditional art, and why he loves to teach new artists...

2dartist: Hi Bastien, thank you for talking to 2dartist! Could you kick things off by introducing yourself a bit to readers who may not be familiar with you and your work?

Bastien Lecouffe Deharme: I am an illustrator, specializing in dark science-fiction, or dark fantasy. Really anything dark and a bit away from our reality is in my range, even if my work always talks about aspects of our reality, they are metaphors.

I used to refuse the appellation 'dark' because it is absolutely not something I am after, but I learned to accept the fact that yes, indeed, this is the way my work is perceived. And there is a reason for it. I am obsessed with flesh, smoke, rust, drips and verticals. I like contrasts; spots of brightness in the dark, a strong color emerging from the dark grays or a shiny piece of gold. I have a taste for tragedies, and the beauty of it. I express those things with digital tools, pencils, charcoals and hopefully soon with oils. ►



● Ink

2da: What was it about the digital tools that made you want to pursue a career in the industry?

BLD: My will to pursue this career does not come from the digital tool. I built all my fundamentals with pencils and brushes, and I knew from a very young age that an artistic career was what I was going to do with my life.

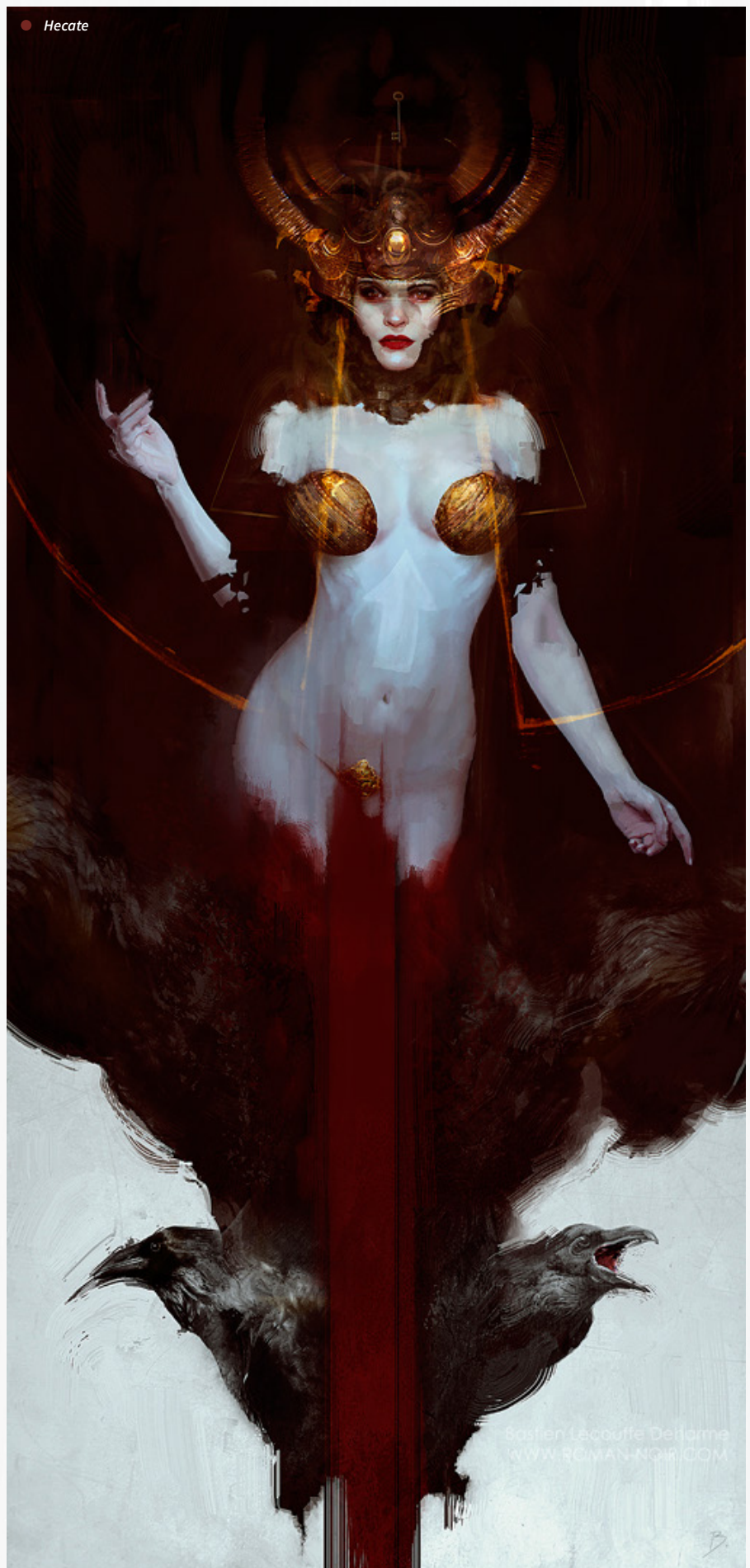
This said, the discovery of the digital tools was a fundamental highlight in this career process. Before that, I used to switch from one medium to another: drawing, painting, photography, collage. The discovery of digital techniques was like opening the door to a new dimension; I could finally combine all those techniques and build some credible visuals with it. I explored many directions at the time, with this crazy tool called GIMP and I remember my work being very criticized on illustration forums and online platforms, because I was really not fitting the trends. But I always thought that was more like a good thing than anything else. Ten years later today, I make sure that I am still in touch with this original 'flamme', and I think this is the reason why a 'traditional feel' still emanates from my digital works.

2da: Where do you draw your inspiration from? What influences your work and motivates you?

BLD: I consider inspiration as an internal library that you need to build for yourself, and perpetually renew. If you want to be creative, 'inspired', you need to feed your personal library with elements that have some kind of echo for yourself. To my students, I often talk about 'personal code': this code that defines yourself and your work. All the bits and pieces of elements that have some influence on your artistic production and your life in general is a part of this code. We all have a different personal code; a different personal combination of specific elements that makes us what we are and what we aren't.

My personal code is mostly built on books, movies and music, not so much on other artist's visual work (even if I am very curious and always looking at images). My code is like a labyrinth where Terry Gilliam and Sergio Leone meet David Lynch and Fellini; where the sound of *16 Horsepower* and Nick Cave echoes with the depth of raw Black Metal. My code is a labyrinth where the tears of *Blade Runner* drips over the black and white faces of Bergman's characters. All those elements painted together with a Pre-Raphaelite digital brush used to tide the hair of a witch. Makes sense? I hope not!

2da: Your work often features dark tones, contrasted with blasts of vivid red, gold or white. How do you know when you have achieved the right balance in your work? ►





BLD: This is sensitivity. I cannot really be explicit about this. I spend a lot of time balancing everything. Another reason why I love digital so much! I can adjust everything to obtain the exact level of intensity I want; soften some elements and sharpen others. The canvas becomes a piece with infinite possibilities of mutations and refinements. I always avoid the spots of full blacks, or full whites, in order to stay in 'natural' ranges. I play with grays a lot, with values to build volumes or the very flat parts of my images. I like to stay somewhere in between two-dimensional zones, full of vertical energy (architectures), and places with more volumes and textures. I love to stay in soft darkness with some strong spots of light, and some desaturated tones with a few intense colors calling for the eyes of the viewer. Those are the way I compose; the ways I tell my stories and the symbolic systems that my images contain.

2da: Do you think that instructing students in digital painting at Shawnee University helped your own creative development? If so, how?

BLD: When I started to teach I wasn't expecting to learn so much from it. I remember a specific class when I explained this dynamic to my students. The process of looking back to all those techniques I developed for my personal work during my self-taught years, and having to put them into words so I could explain and communicate them to others, was a very big step for me. It gave me a lot of distance, made me question my own ways and find others. It's a great experience that I recommend to any artist. Teaching is also a dissection of your own work. An open look in your own guts. And this helps understanding and progressing.

Today my freelance career is quite intense and I barely have any free time. I have often considered quitting teaching because I do not need it financially, but I need it as a balance. It is a perpetual critic overlooking what I am doing. I love giving a little boost to my enthusiastic students, looking at the awakening of their artistic dreams. I was them, not so long ago.

2da: Can you tell us a bit about the idea behind your personal project, and your graphic novel *Memories of Retrocity*?

BLD: *Memories of Retrocity* is a novel I wrote and illustrated. Not a comic book, but a 120 page, hardcover book, with full pages of illustrations and texts. It's the diaries of a cop in exile, in a city from where you cannot escape, where humans and objects are merging together, where androids attempt suicide and the rain rarely stops falling. The book tells the tragic memories of a man who came there with no hopes and started to build some after he realized he had no chance of ever getting out.



If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out as an artist, what advice would you give?

I could tell the young me to relax, to stop stressing over the doubts that hang over his head every day, about his choices in life. It would definitely save him a lot of headaches, sleepless nights and probably a few tears. But I think those headaches, nights of work and tears are a fundamental part of what made the person I am today. So, I will simply leave my young self alone, because he did well, so far!

“To create good images, you need to stay perpetually in touch with the fundamentals. Sketching from life, studying; this is part of my routine”

I don't want to say too much about it. I am waiting for the English translation, and I will have to rework all the art for a future US publication, just because I am not satisfied anymore with the visual work I did five years ago. I would love to update it with all the changes that occurred in my techniques since then. But the story needs to be told again.

2da: How has continuing to sketch and create traditional art benefited your digital art?

BLD: To create good images, you need to stay perpetually in touch with the fundamentals. Sketching from life, studying; this is part of my routine. I love the possibilities of digital work for pushing the images to a complex level of finish, but as far as 'daily practice' goes, paper and canvas are the best. I need to stay in touch with paper, pencils and charcoals. For the feel, the quality of the lines and a long list of reasons. I make sure I include at least five hours a week of life-drawing sessions with models. This routine is the strong foundation behind the digital work that I produce.

2da: Which artists do you admire and how did they influence your work?

BLD: I keep complete folders of references that I find online or in museums, or books. I have folders full of visual works, from old masters to current artists that fascinate me. Rembrandt, John Collier, Alphonse Mucha, John William Waterhouse, Phil Hale, Brom, Ashley Wood, Mike Mignola and so many others. My influences are pretty obvious for those who know those works.

I love and learn a lot from the works of great ones; they are part of this personal code that I was defining earlier. I do what we all do, grab some bits from here, and pieces from there. Not stealing, but accepting the echo that their work has on mine.

2da: What would your typical working day be like?

BLD: I usually work until the sun rises. I try to go to bed before the birds start singing. It is the most nightmarish sound in the world. I love birds, I love to hear them, but I can't take the sound of their morning songs screaming at my face: 'Sun is coming, go to bed or you will sleep through the entire day and not see the sunlight. Get yourself a normal life!'. Night is the moment when everything sleeps, and it is when I can truly focus on my work. ►

Bastien's significant artwork: *The Black Queen*

This image was created in 2010 and is still the piece in my portfolio that most people remember. It is the first portrait I made of Whitney, my spouse, when she visited me in Paris for the first time. It became the cover of *Memories of Retrocity*, my first book, published after I moved to the US to join her.



● *The Black Queen*

Is there anything you think budding artists should try to avoid?

Trends. Don't mind them. I am always very enthusiastic when I look at the growing community of kids and young adults dreaming of making a career with their artwork. But I am also very skeptical and sometimes scared for them when I realize how much some of them are more obsessed with 'fitting with the trends' than with exploring new paths. It's a very hard thing to find 'your' way.

It is essential to discover what your personal and unique place in this world is. If you simply try to reproduce the cool work that you see online, posted by other artists, you are making yourself unnecessary and your work loses any interest. You must find this code, gather those influences and find what truly unique work can come from that. That is where you will find the artist in you, and that is what will make clients ask for you, and nobody else. I know it sounds like some kind of quest. A quest consisting of finding your 'self' and trying to reconcile the visions you have with some unique ways to express them. It sounds like a quest because it is one!



I try to see the day, so I force myself to wake before noon, and usually go for a run. I balance my workflow with a lot of exercising and physical activities.

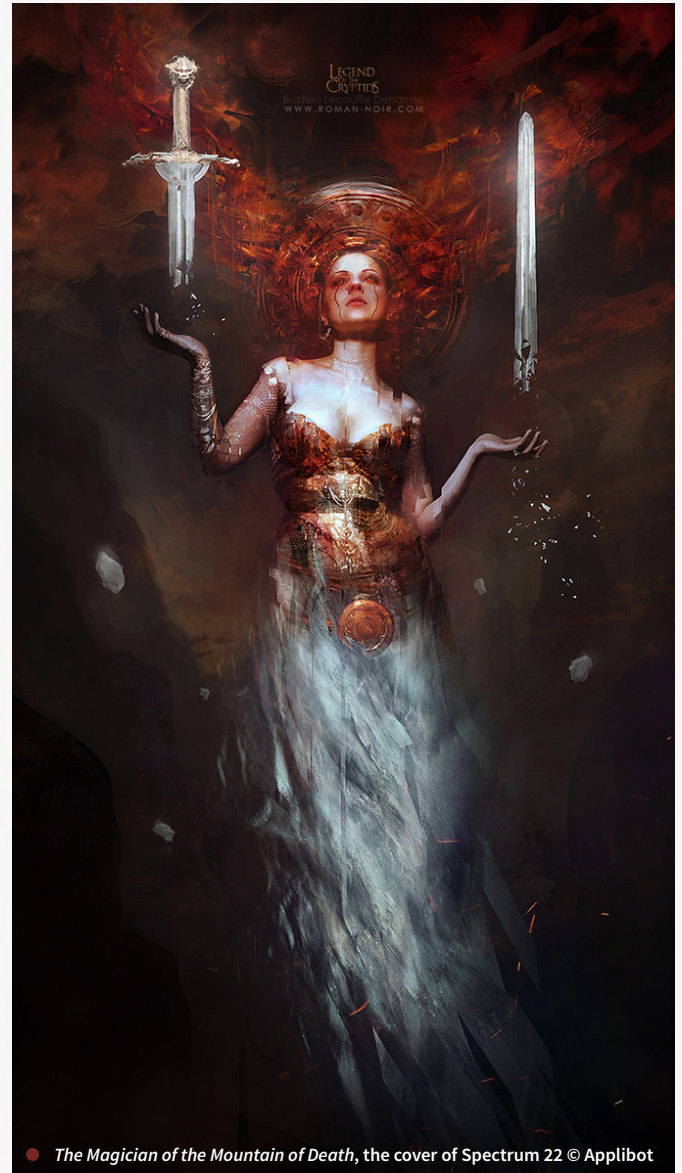
That helps me to keep up with the amount of hours spent in front of a screen. I usually keep the administrative part of freelancing for the afternoon, when the world is awake. Emails, paperwork, phone calls and stuff of that kind. I warm up with sketches

before dinner, and then I take a break, spending time with my spouse. And around ten or eleven starts the serious work sessions, until 6 or 7 in the morning.

I always try to end my night of work at a satisfying moment; when the picture is at a good place to get back to it the day after. If I stop the flow with things that are not settled, I cannot sleep. This odd routine was hurting me for a long time as I was trying to fight

it, to stay on a normal schedule. Today I just embrace it and I have never been as productive. I am a work machine, and the next step will be to allow myself some breaks. To breathe, and dedicate more time to some 'unwinding' activities that I truly enjoy and do not discuss much!

2da: Do you have any tricks or tips to keep yourself motivated on a difficult project?



🕒 Artist Timeline Bastien's career so far

1993: Meeting with a very encouraging art teacher

2006: Obtained a Master of Fine Arts

2007: Discovery of the digital tools Wacom tablet and GIMP

2007: First book cover for an Anthology of H.P. Lovecraft's work

2011: Publication of the graphic novel *Memories of Retrocity*

2012: Began working as a digital painting instructor in the US

2013: First publication in Spectrum and contract with Applibot

2014: Contract with *Magic: The Gathering*

2015: Cover art for Spectrum 22

2016: Gold and Silver awards for *Infected by Art*



BLD: I have the chance to be able to refuse projects that do not attract me. When I work on something, it's because I find it interesting. One way or another. Today, most clients contact me because they want 'my' work. So I'm rarely asked to fight against my own process.

I sometimes accept projects that will take me in other directions and a bit away from my comfort zone. This is a great way to learn.

To answer your question, I don't ever feel that I need to keep myself motivated, because I only work on things that motivate me! And this is my tip: don't try to go all over the place, and try to stay true to what you do. Don't do boring stuff, life is too short!

2da: Are there any areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into (and why)? ►

What do you think has been most influential to your career success?

There are moments I like to think of, and people who have a specific place in that story. Benjamin Carré, for example, a great French illustrator whose work made me think that I could make a living out of those universes that I love so much. I wrote to him ten years ago asking for advices and was so surprised to get an answer. Today I answer the kids who message me, as much as I can.

There are artist friends like Anders Lazaret or Johann Bodin, who always gave me strong feedback during those early years. Today I still share my work with them when I need constructive criticism.

There was the day I saw *Blade Runner* for the first time, as a kid. The day I finished the book *La Horde du Contrevent* by Alain Damasio. The tears I cried at the end of *Kagemusha*, wondering why this was touching me so much (the answer is, again, in the obsession I have for tragedy).

And then there are stories with women. One that I had to leave to be able to focus on my artwork without feeling guilty. Another that took me by the hand and asked me to tell her stories. And the one that I crossed an ocean for, and who sleeps in the room next to my workshop while I answer an interview in the middle of the night.



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Jean-Luc Deharme
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“If I can find time to branch out, it will actually be ‘out’. Out of digital and back to actual canvases. Not because I am tired of digital, but because one feeds the other, and this is what I crave today”

BLD: There are aspects of the digital world that are attractive to me, like 3D for example. I would love to push my skills with that software, and I think it would lead to great creative places. But I honestly enjoy a kind of archaic relationship with digital, and this also explains again why my work looks so ‘traditional’. I use digital as a tool to mix my traditional techniques. I create my own textures, and brushes to emulate this feel, while still staying in touch with the unique taste and possibilities that the medium provides.

If I can find time to branch out, it will actually be ‘out’. Out of digital and back to actual canvases. Not because I am tired of digital, but because one feeds the other, and this is what I crave today.

2da: What has been your favorite commission/project to work on so far and why?

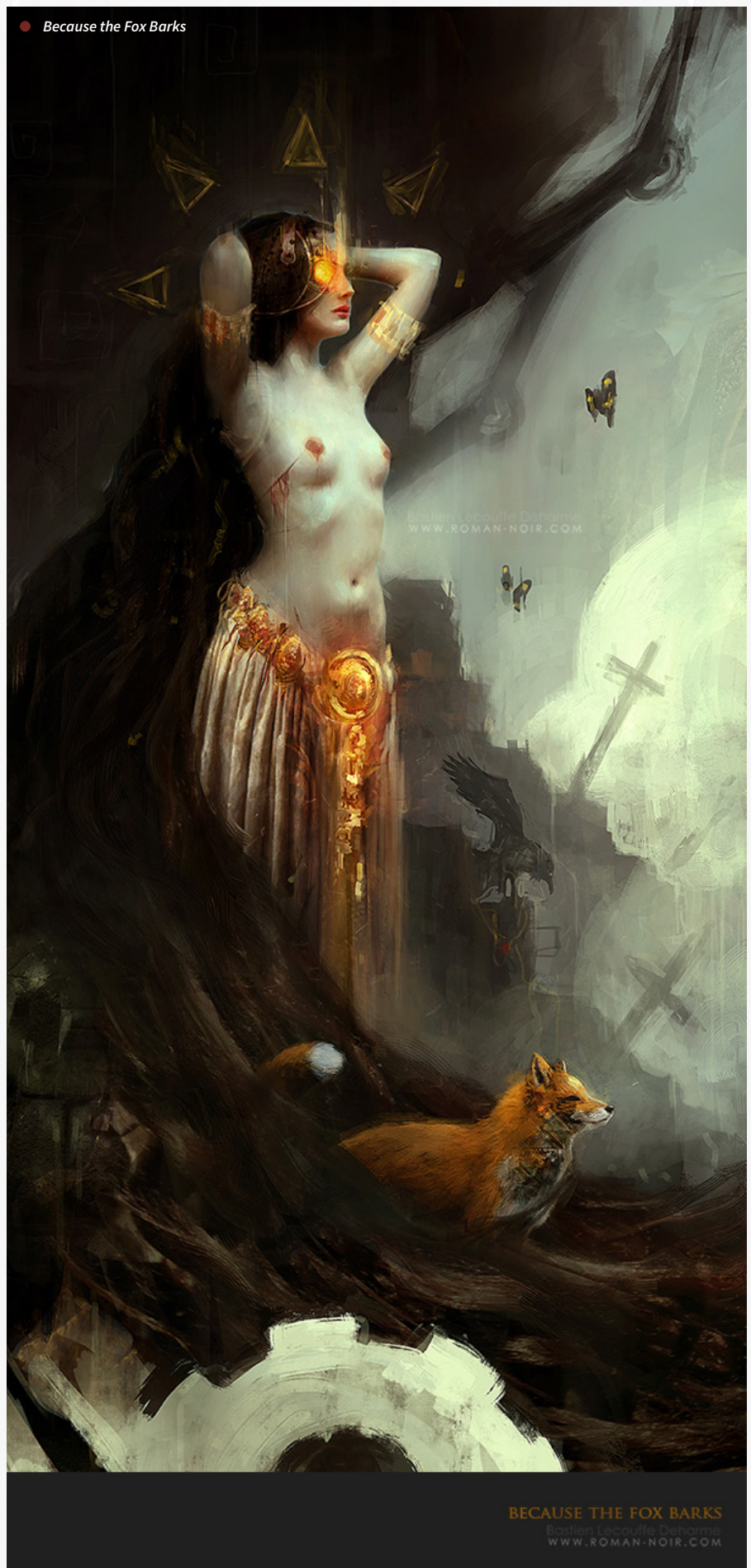
BLD: I have worked on so many projects that I sincerely loved, that naming just a few would be forgetting the others. Let’s just say that I have been honored to create book covers for authors that made me want – a long time ago – to become an illustrator. Authors like Philip. K. Dick, Chuck Palahniuk, H. P. Lovecraft, Clive Barker, and today I’m working with DAW Books on the new publication of some Tanith Lee books.

Working with Applibot for those past two years was great, because they gave me total freedom and I was able to develop my personal work while being paid for it, and of course *Magic: The Gathering*! When I was collecting those cards 20 years ago, I would never have imagined I would become one of those mysterious guys who create those dreamy thumbnails. I was truly honored and surprised when Jeremy Jarvis contacted me.

2da: Do you have any plans for future projects? Is there anything exciting for us to look out for?

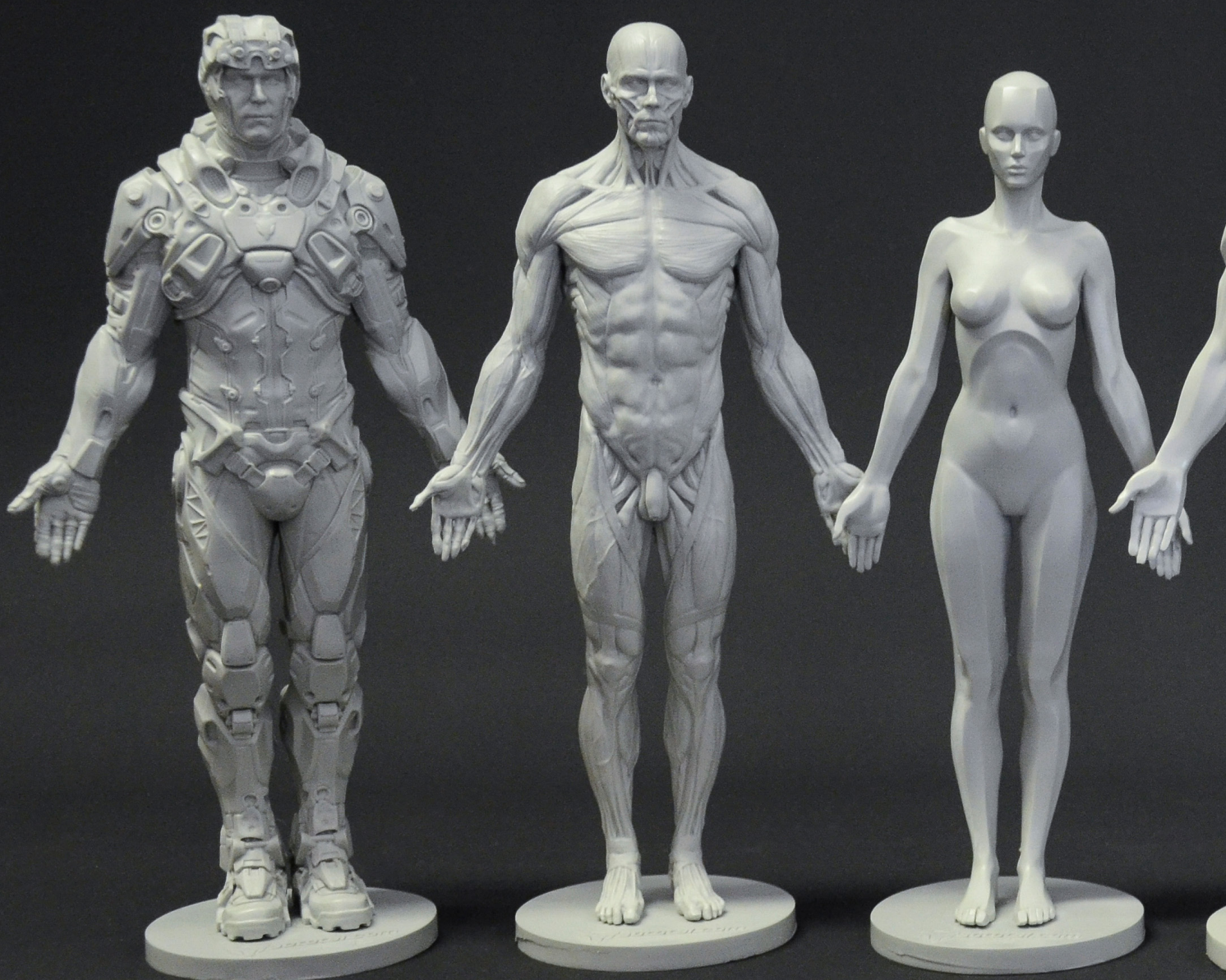
BLD: The English version/reboot of *Memories of Retrocity*, an artbook to commemorate ten years of my career, and many things that I am not allowed to discuss here! But yes, look out for things to come! ●

Thank you Bastien for chatting to 2dartist!



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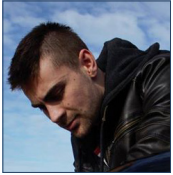




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The Artist



Blake Rottinger
blakerottinger.com

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Blake Rottinger is a concept artist in the entertainment industry specializing in environment design. He is based in Sydney, Australia and is currently freelancing for Crystal Dynamics game studio.

Powerful game environments

Discover how freelance concept artist Blake Rottinger creates his striking environment designs for the entertainment industry ▶



Although freelance concept artist Blake Rottinger is relatively new to the digital art scene, over the past few years he has been making an impression with his absorbing environment designs.

Beginning his career as a fine artist, Blake has developed into a much in-demand artist for the entertainment industry. With a hard work ethic and a fascination with art which leads him to explore new skills and techniques, Blake has recently been sought by AAA game companies, seeing him work on projects for Eidos Montréal and Crystal Dynamics.

We caught up with Blake to find out more about how he established himself in the digital art industry, how he has developed his style and how he manages his growing work schedule...

2dartist: Hi Blake! Thank you for talking to 2dartist. Could you start by introducing yourself a bit to any readers who are unfamiliar with you and your work?

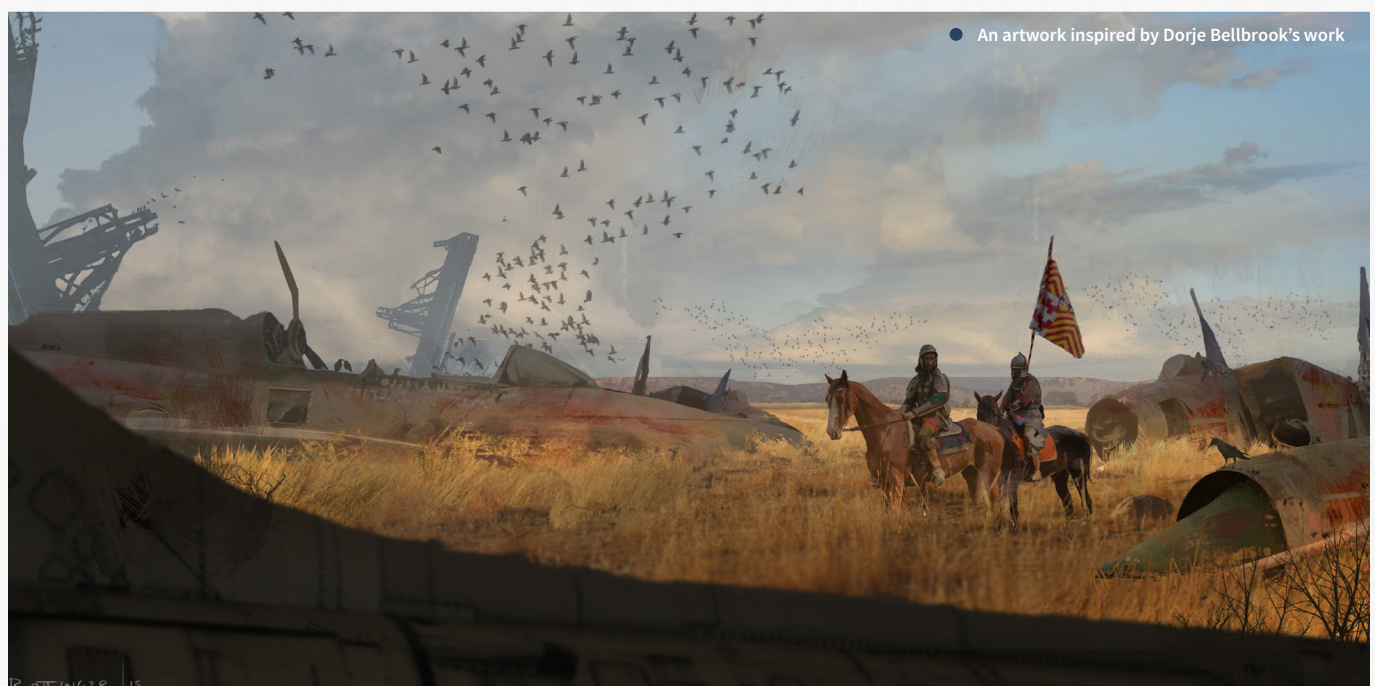
Blake Rottinger: Hi! Thank you for taking the time to interview me! And hello readers! I'm a Sydney based concept artist currently freelancing in the entertainment industry. Right now I'm working with Crystal Dynamics on an unannounced project. I mostly specialize in environment work but I also like to delve into characters and props when I get the chance. And I'm always out to learn and practice my craft! Never stop learning!

2da: You have worked on a number of different projects, from AAA videogames to industrial design. How do you adapt your style and working processes for these different projects?

BR: Style normally isn't an issue (most of the time). When an employer comes to you, chances are they've looked at your work and want you for your style. In concept art style is important but not as important as creating a readable image.

So adapting style comes sort of naturally, working processes are a different bag though. You have to do a lot of problem solving with the designs as well as your art to meet them. I think it's good to look at what sort of work the company has been doing and almost try to decrypt the image. Look at specific techniques and processes. Also look at a whole variety of things in the same vein of what you are doing. Movies, videogames, anything!

2da: How did you go about establishing yourself in the digital art industry?





● *New Friends, a personal piece artwork*

BR: Basically I just tried to keep my online presence updated. The rest takes care of itself. You get better and you eventually get noticed. And if you keep updating your work then it makes a big difference. It's good to be on quite a few different avenues too, Facebook, art forums and ArtStation definitely. But I would highly recommend having your own personal website when you are sending off job applications. Nothing beats a personal website.

Another thing is to really get to know people all over the world. I get such good feedback from so many other artists I know over the web. It's the best way to grow and you constantly meet new people from the people you already know!

2da: Do you have any advice for readers who are just starting out in the industry?

BR: I would say to learn the fundamentals obviously; perspective, value, all those things. But it can be boring at times, so remember it's totally fine to just do things for fun. Take 20 hours painting that mech you always wanted to! Things like that.

Also do tutorials, I can't stress that enough. These days there are so many on Gumroad and Youtube from the professionals in the industry, they are literally giving you the industry secrets to become a better artist. Don't be afraid to ask for feedback!

However remember that artists are all very different. Some prefer this technique over that and so on. So remember that when asking for feedback, if a person you respect gives you feedback which you don't agree with, sleep on it. Really think about it. Don't just throw it away. But also if you've thought about it extensively, it's also okay to disagree. These decisions are what makes us all unique.

2da: What are your preferred tools and methods to work with? Are there any brushes you find yourself using again and again?

BR: My tools are pretty standard. Photoshop and a Wacom Tablet are basically the crutches of any digital artist. I'm actually using the same 8 x 6 tablet I got for my birthday when I was about 16. So it's very old now, but going strong! Other programs

are MODO and Maya for 3D modeling. For brushes again, I don't use any special brushes. I have some free brushes and also I downloaded Kalen Chock's brushes which I like very much. His are a compilation of brushes he's found, if you want to take a look you can find it on Google easily enough.

But you can download them from DeviantArt, his username is k04sk. The basic brush I probably use the most is a rectangular textured brush which you can find in that pack. I use that for all my non-specific painting tasks.

2da: How have you developed your style over time?

BR: I think I looked at a bunch of artists whose style I really liked and pretty much tried to mimic it. After a while you sort of tend to create your own style. As I mentioned before, there are little forks in the road throughout a painting and artists all make different decisions. This makes us all unique. I would say not to worry about style too much (unless you are going into something like Disney) but you naturally evolve into your style. You don't have to monitor it. ►

🕒 Artist Timeline Blake's career so far

2011: First experimented seriously with art in late high school

2012: Enrolled in a fine arts university

2012: First freelance job during first year of university

2013: First major freelance job on a post-apocalyptic game for Xivisoft

2014: Completed his major work for university at the end of his third year

2014: Graduated with Bachelor of Visual Arts

2015: First year out of university he worked with Australian company Goodoil Films

2015: Worked with Cartel Artists, a Sydney based concept art studio

2015: First AAA company gig working with Eidos Montréal for four months

2016: Currently working with AAA company Crystal Dynamics on an unannounced project

- Blake often creates his personal works in lunch breaks and the evenings in between client work



ROTTINGER / 15





● *Christmas Alley, a twist on a festive scene*

2da: Where do you look for inspiration? Are there any other artists you particularly admire?

BR: I have so many artists I could name off but the big ones are John Sweeney, Eytan Zana, Nick Gindraux, and Aaron Limonick. All those guys work with Naughty Dog actually.

I'm constantly inspired by the work that comes out of that studio! Also the work from One Pixel Brush. But the artists who inspired me from the very beginning were Kalen Chock and David Holland. My style now may be very different to them, but I loved their use

of bright colors and their painterly approach. I also own many concept art books from videogames to movies. I chuck on some soundtracks and just look through them. Soundtrack music is a great way to get into the zone and into a world.

2da: What makes a project fun for you?

BR: Well I think painting most of the time is pretty fun in itself, however I enjoy really thinking in depth about what I'm designing, especially the little things like set dressing in a scene. Imagining the player walking through the thing you created is highly

motivating, even if they don't pay attention to some of the things you painstakingly put effort into, that in itself is an accomplishment because nothing is jarring them out of the world. It's all about creating a believable space and for some reason I love it!

2da: Do you have any tips or tricks to keep yourself motivated on a difficult project?

BR: I feel it's good to remember that not every painting has to be super pretty and the next Mona Lisa. Creating a variety of works that the team doesn't like is also useful, because you're all working



together to figure out a direction. By doing that you cross off other paths which would have led to nowhere. Nipping ideas in the bud saves a lot of time for the whole project and team.

So if the project is difficult it's motivating to know that even when you're failing, you are making progress in the scheme of things. As I mentioned before, imagining the finished product for me is extremely motivating, it gives you a solid end goal.

2da: Can you tell us anything about the projects you are working on at the moment? ►

If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out as an artist, what advice would you give?

I would probably say to not get caught up in the 'flashy lights' of concept art; all the speed painting and fanart. But instead look deeply into the really detailed pieces and really take your time. I was very caught up in trying to be fast; because that's what a concept artist has to be. Now I would say to not worry about speed. That comes with time, which I learned when I started getting into more tutorials.

Tutorials are the golden goose, I should have gotten into tutorials a lot earlier, but instead for the first year I kind of tried to self-teach and ended up doing the same things. Obviously I was getting better, but not as quickly as I could have been.



● A personal work created over one weekend



● A piece exploring the use of more color

BR: I wish! But unfortunately not. I'm very excited to be working on what I am right now and hopefully I'll get to show something soon!

2da: What do you like most about working as a freelance concept artist?

BR: I think never being bored. I'm constantly working on new projects and with new people, so it's pretty difficult for it to get stale! I also get to structure my

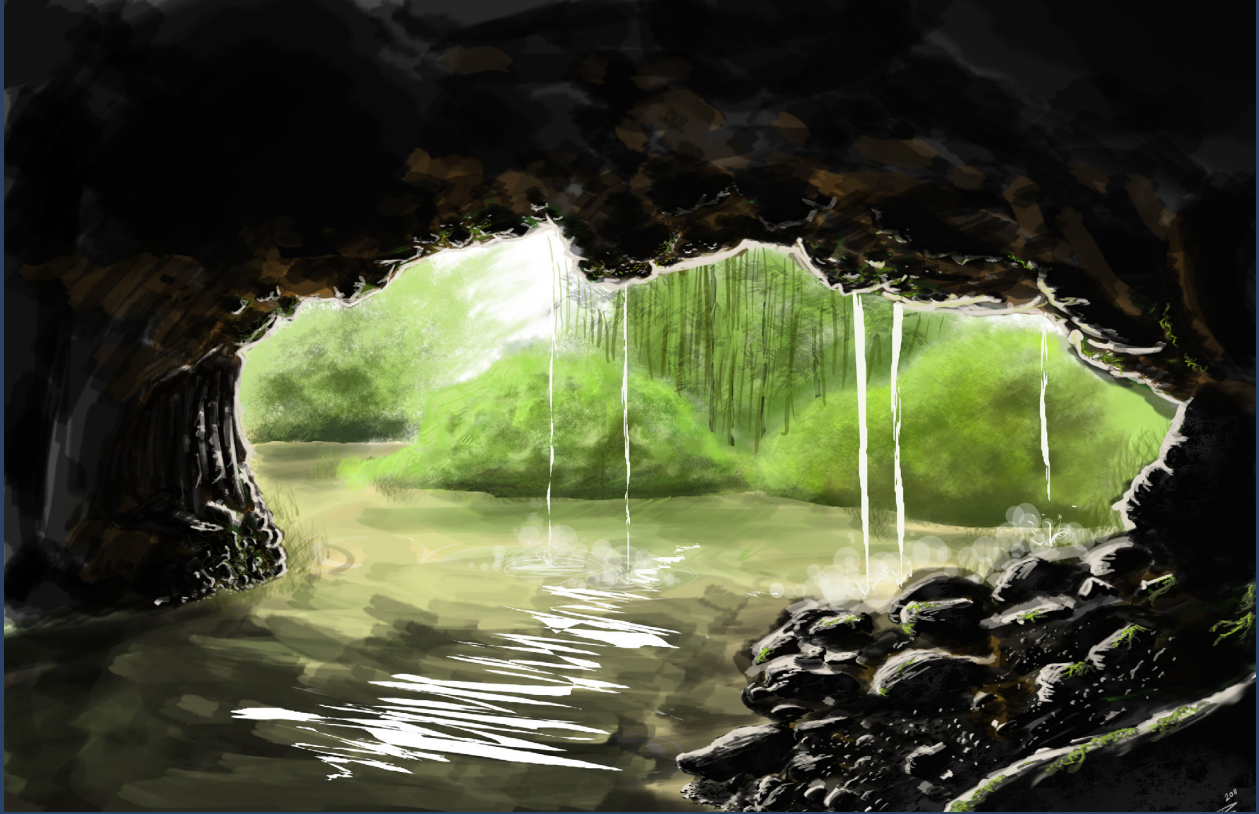
day how I want. If I finish work early then I don't have to sit around an office until home time! I can go hang out with friends or anything I want. However I would enjoy working in-house one day, unfortunately in Australia our AAA games industry is pretty non-existent. So freelancing is one of the better options to get into it if you live here.

2da: Could you describe your typical workflow for us? How do you approach a new project?

BR: Normally I start to go on a research spree. Just looking at images related to the subject, reading up on stuff and taking notes. I try to get an understanding then I go and create some pretty quick photo-bashed images. At this point I'm trying to get something close to what the client is looking for overall. There's not much into the detailing at this point because that comes from the back and forth between me and my art director. It's pretty rare to get everything right the first try (at least for me).

Blake's significant artwork

I remember this image being the image which started off my whole passion. Looking back on it, it's pretty bad. But back then, I thought it was great. I came back to digital painting after a long time away from it and cranked this out. I thought to myself 'wow, this is actually pretty good, you know I can do this!' And once you get that you do another and another and get a little better each time, which fuels your motivation. This image gave me the self-confidence to keep going and follow my dream.



My workflow throughout the day though normally goes like this: have a daily sync-up Skype call with my art director/producer and anyone else I need to talk to. Then I get to work pretty non-stop until lunch. At this point I've usually hashed out everything pretty well so the rest of the day is normally detailing a bit more and fixing things that need fixing. Not much to it actually!

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

BR: Oh a variety of things. I love riding my motorbike, going for rides up north to the beaches. Skateboarding which I am actually just getting back into now from quite a time ago. It's great fun learning new tricks and finding new spots to skate. Games and movies obviously; right now I'm playing *Fallout 4* and *Just Cause 3*. And hanging out with my mates! Playing ping pong, going out partying. All that really good stuff.

2da: And finally, do you have any plans for future projects? Is there anything exciting for us to look forward to?



● A personal work; *Anxious*

BR: Right now my future plans are just to continue working freelance and try to make the best work I can. Hopefully that will lead onto new avenues for other companies and other projects. So get excited for that! Also just continue trying to get better

through my personal work, focusing on coming up with more original ideas for my work. ●

Thank you Blake for chatting to 2dartist!



* A SELECTION OF OUR ALUMNI'S ACHIEVEMENTS, CONGRATULATIONS TO THEM ALL.

2DARTIST SKETCHING

A LOOK BACK

Take a look back through some of the
inspiring sketches from the past 10 years
and pick up tips on how to incorporate
traditional skills into your work

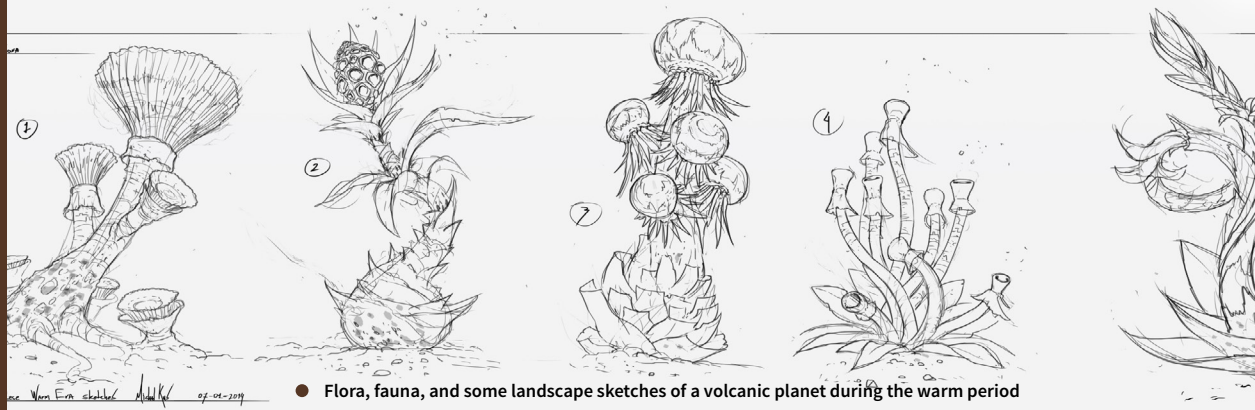
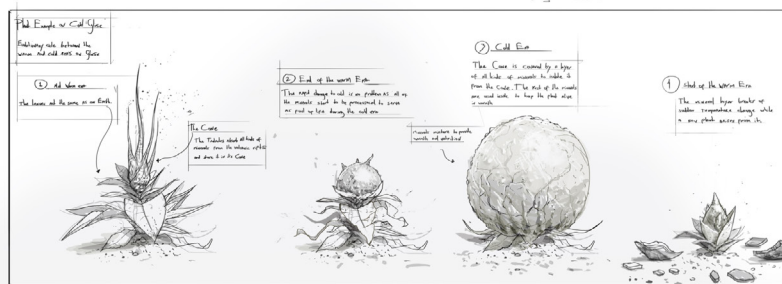
Rediscover some of the inspiring sketches and artist tips from the past 10 years...

Over the years we have discovered that sketching has many benefits for artists of all mediums; most significantly we have

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of *2dartist*, we take a look back over some of the sketches that have passed through our pages and reflect on the drawing insights from some of the best 2D artists around...

Being creative is a prescription

Personally I think creativity is the most important. Sketch a lot and your flow of creativeness will turn into something that is a part of you as a being. It is vital that you train your brain to see forms out of this world and arrange them in a different way. That is basically what creativeness is. The challenging part is to pick up and see the forms from our world and arrange them in a cooler way, then execute it professionally by drawing with confidence. Sketch a lot and your brain will adapt to it.



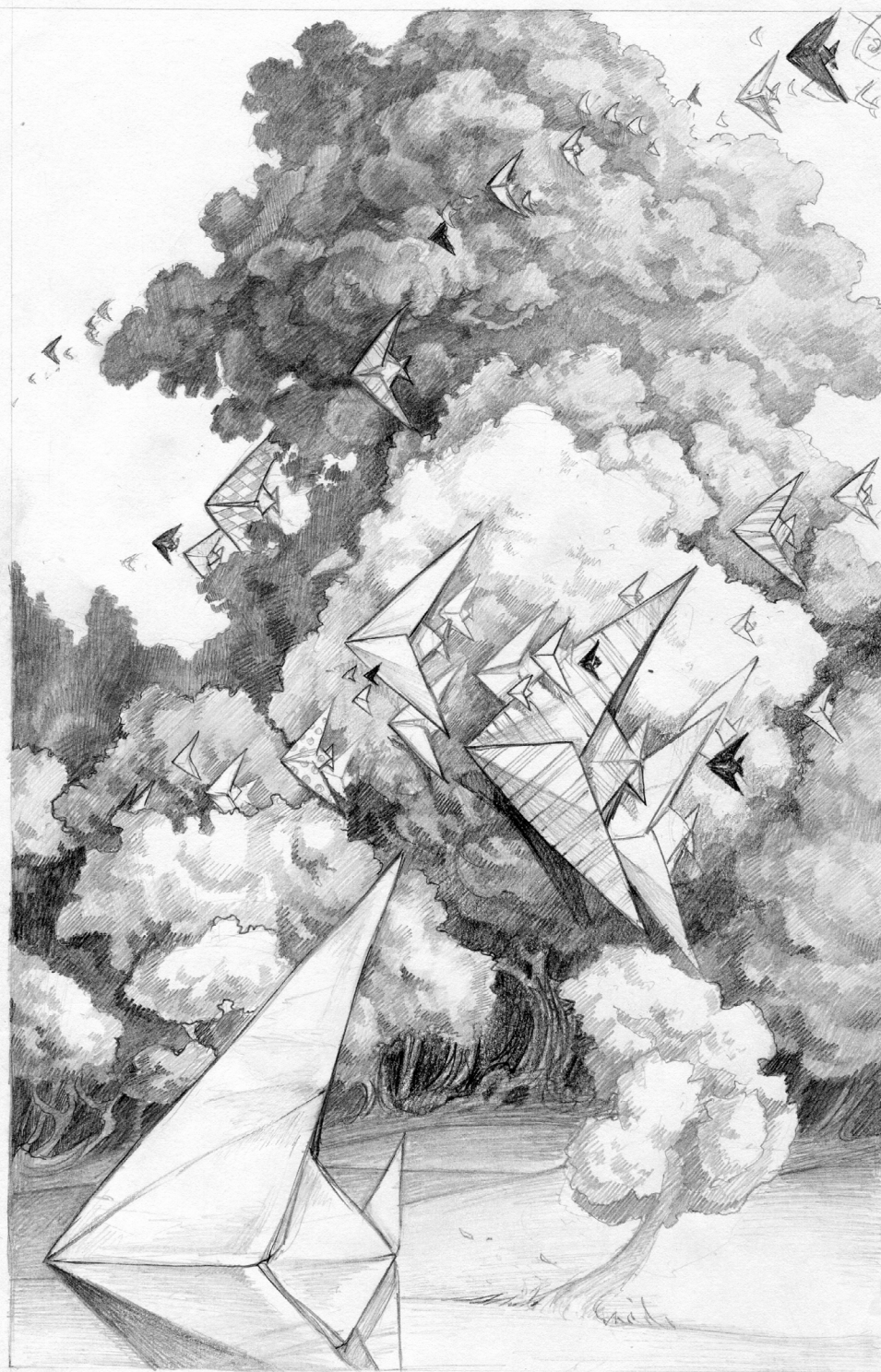
- Flora, fauna, and some landscape sketches of a volcanic planet during the warm period

LENA RICHARDS

Take a clipboard!

It used to be that I had actual sketchbooks, but I walk a lot and always take my drawing with me, and my sketchbooks got ruined. So I started to carry around a clipboard with several sheets of regular office paper, which I can just leave at home later or give away to people if they like something I draw.

● An abstract landscape



⚡ SABIN BOYKINOV

Embrace diversity

Try to have many diverse personal interests; don't focus on painting and drawing only. Read a lot of books, research world-famous designers and architects, and meet different kinds of people. Be like a child; keep your fascination with nature alive, and store an extensive visual library in your mind.

- Sabin researches different characters throughout the ages



⚡ MIKE BUTKUS

Not just paper

My favorite technique is drawing with black Prismacolor pencil and hard graphite on Dura-lene because the combination of these mediums produces a smooth and creamy texture in the drawing. You don't have to work hard to create the depth and value of your lines when using this specific vellum.

- This scary zombie was drawn on Dura-lene for Mike's *How To Draw Zombies* book



⚡ AJ FRENA

Work with mixed media

There is something about holding your work in your hands, being able to see paint strokes and marks, which can't compare to digital copies. However I find myself working mostly in mixed media these days, doing a good chunk of the painting in acrylic/ink then finishing it up digitally. This process is a lot faster so allows for me to finish a larger body of work.

● *Feed*, an acrylic and ink drawing on paper



⚡ MARK MOLNAR

Keep in contact with your materials

I think drawing is the fundament of any art form and I also like to have a close contact with the material that I am working with. In the age of interactive pressure-sensitive screens, like the Wacom Cintiq, it's becoming less and less of an issue, but the best tools for me are still my sketchbooks and pencils.

- Mark was amazed by the chaotic shapes of this tree, in contrast with the people lying in its shade



⚡ IVAN KASH

Capture spirit and ideas

It's important when sketching to capture the spirit, silhouette and basic features of your character's personality. Ideas and shapes are born in my head in the process of drawing, so I try to transfer them onto the picture as precisely as possible.



● Ivan wanted to draw something demonic

⚡ ALEX 'RHINO' VOROSHEV

Start with a dash

Prior to working on the concept for any object, character or location, I always start with a dash, silhouette, blur, or just a few strokes to give my imagination the impulse to create something new.

This concept was a rather complex character to design as it has a distinctive set of characteristics that are well known in myths of this kind, and if you give up on them then you risk making the creature unrecognizable. My additions to the traditional interpretation were a muzzle of a predatory ape-man, rather than a human face, spikes on the head, tail and paws, and I also invented a pair of odd Trichoplax wings for her.



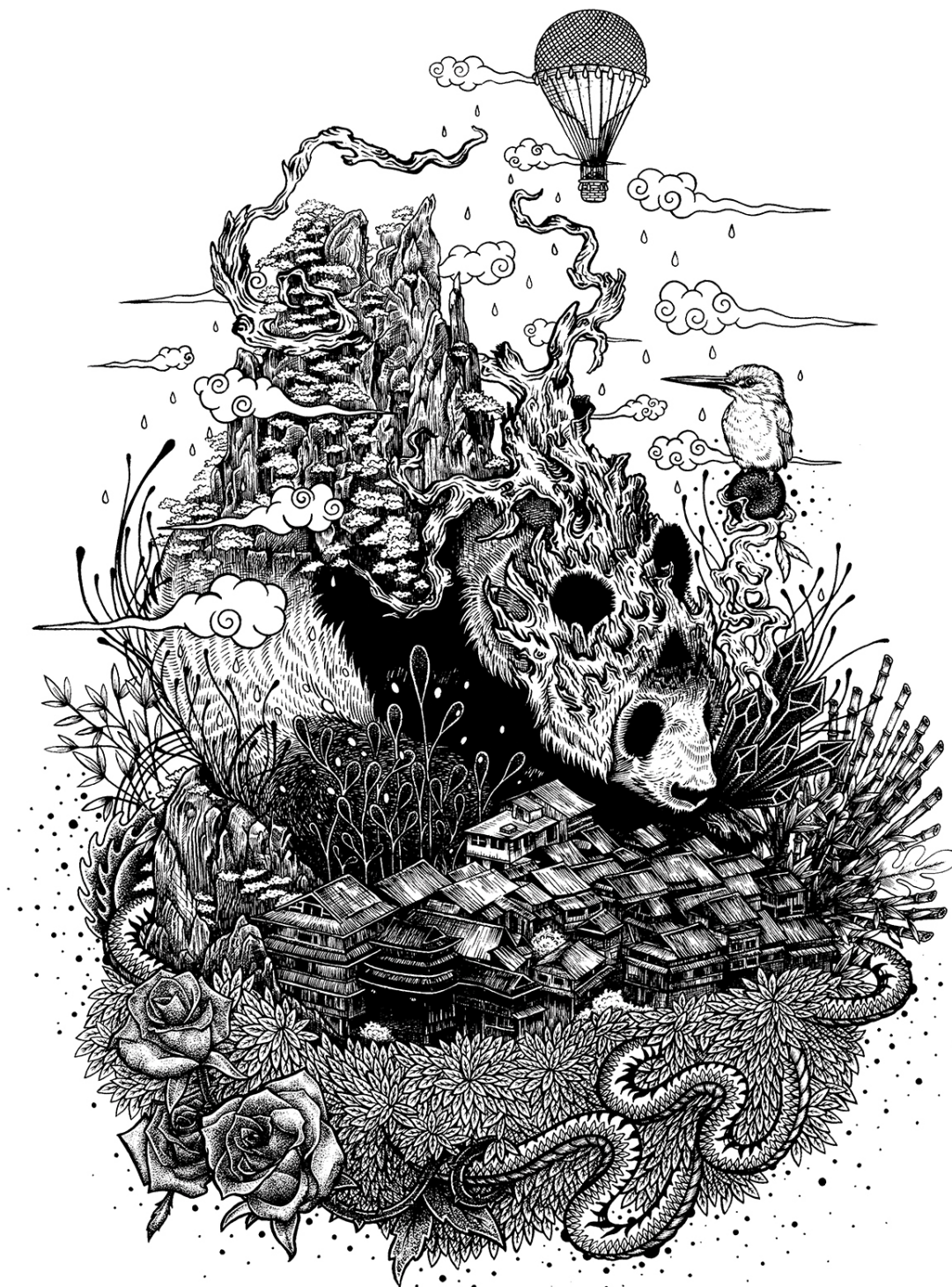
- *Manticora* combines well known mythical characteristics mixed with new additions such as ape-like features and Trichoplax wings

MAT MILLER

Loose sketching

The best technique for sketching is just to stay loose and be confident in your strokes. It's not the end of the world if what you put on the page doesn't look exactly like what you are sketching. In terms of line quality, I've always been told to work through the line quickly and smoothly. Again this comes back to confidence and being loose with your hands.

● *Land of the Sleeping Giants*



⚡ JEFF MIRACOLA

Start with the torso

Sketching is important to do all the time. I draw nearly every day regardless of whether I have an assignment to work on. Like anything else, the more I do it, the better I get. My ability to sketch out ideas happens much faster now than it did 20 years ago.

When drawing figures or creatures, I often start with the torso. It generally has the largest surface area and becomes my foundation for the drawing. I know that if I can get the proportions correct on the torso, then everything else will fall into place. Starting my drawings this way allows me to plan better for the size and placement of the figure within my composition.

- Sketched purely for fun, this drawing emerged without any planning. Jeff just put pencil to paper and started drawing



⚡ TRAN NGUYEN

Keep sketches small

My preliminaries are usually done on a small, intimate scale and the best surface for this is smooth Bristol paper. I generally prefer graphite when it comes to sketching, from grade 8H to 9B, Tuff Stuff eraser sticks, and Prismacolor's Magic Rub. For value studies, I'll sometimes import the graphite sketch into Adobe Photoshop to add a deeper level of lights and darks. Using a Wacom Intuos 3 tablet and the soft round brush, I can create a more refined study for clients before continuing onto the final illustration.



● This sketch illustrates Tran's deep interest in nostalgia and distant memories, wandering off into nature

⚡ WYLIE BECKERT

Draw from life

Drawing from life, even if it's just a still life of a coffee cup, strengthens your observational skills. Even if I've seen an object a thousand times, I don't really understand it until I take the time to draw it. By really looking at an object and figuring out what shape it is and what details make it identifiable and lifelike, I'm able to add it to a mental bank of specific, believable objects that I can reference for future work. Once you've noticed how a coffee cup's rim catches the light, or how its base sits on a tiny beveled edge, you'll never draw it as a lifeless hollow cylinder again, and your illustrations will be that much more compelling.



- Working on plain white Bristol paper, Wylie uses powdered graphite to build dark areas and create a soft effect

2dartist

Would you like to see your sketches featured in 2dartist magazine?

We're always on the lookout for talented artists
and their artwork to adorn the pages of our
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Art Gallery

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!



Giedi Prime

Alex Tornberg

Year created: 2015

Web: alextornberg.com

Submit your images! Simply email annie@3dtotal.com



ALEX TORNBER

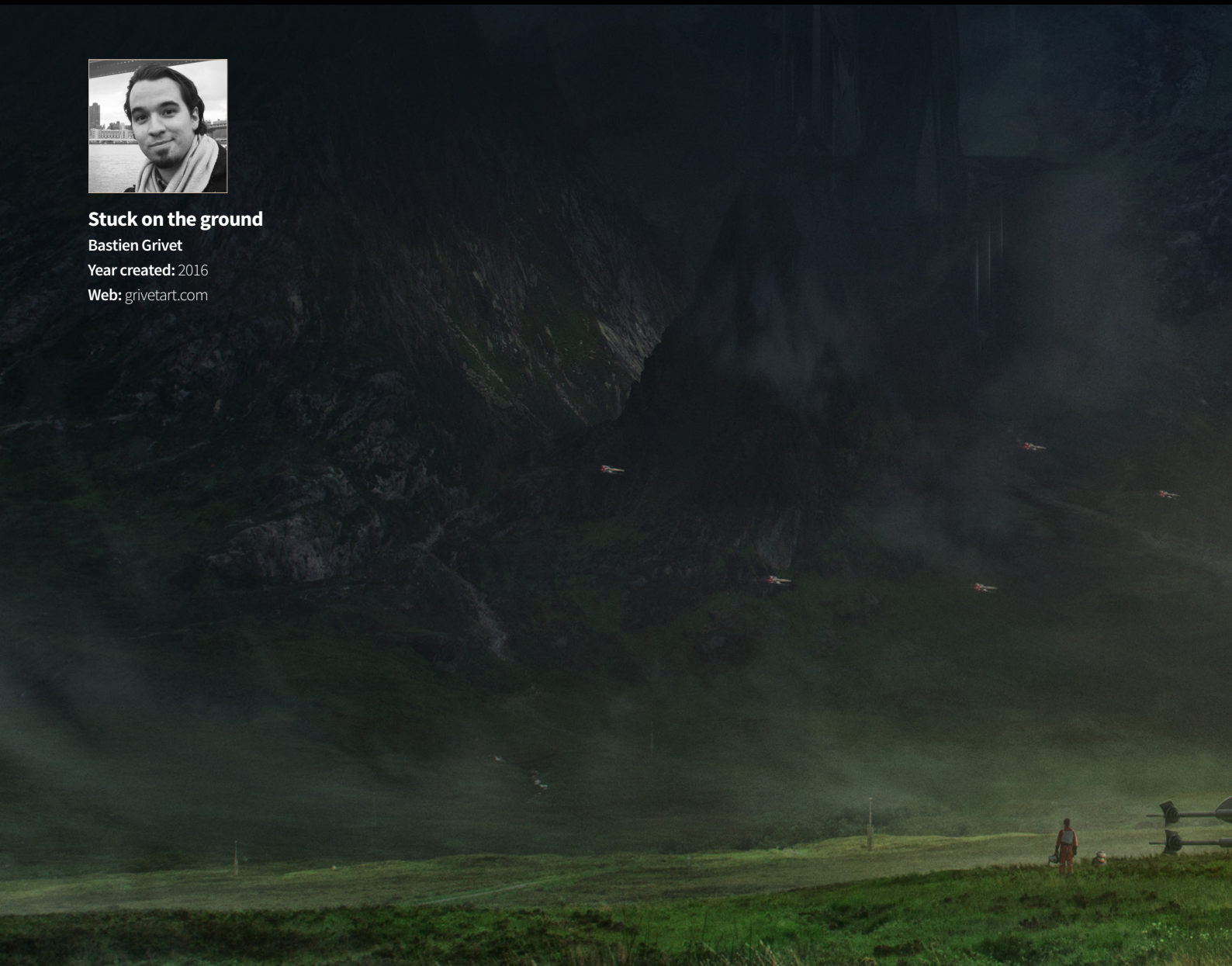


Stuck on the ground

Bastien Grivet

Year created: 2016

Web: grivetart.com







Anomaly Cave

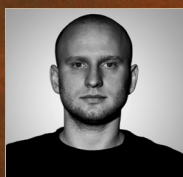
Sergey Musin

Year created: 2015

Web: samfx.com

© Sergey Musin

Musin '15



CTHULHU

Michael Michera

Year created: 2015

Web: michera.artstation.com





CREEPY SCAVENGER

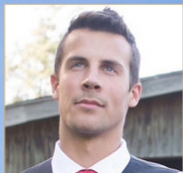
Michael Michera

Year created: 2015

Web: michera.artstation.com







Serene

Jacob Duncan

Year created: 2015

Web: jacobduncanart.com





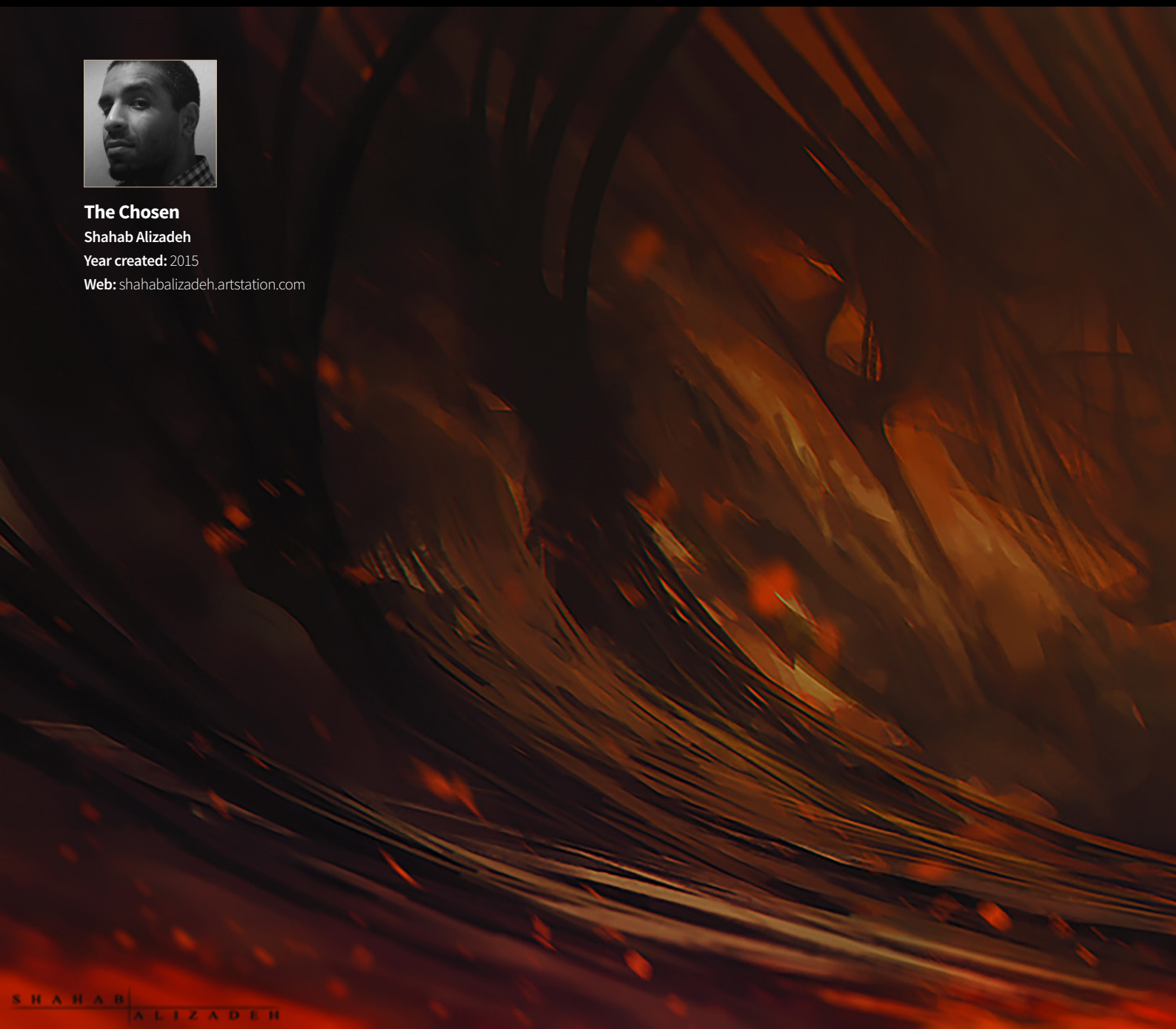


The Chosen

Shahab Alizadeh

Year created: 2015

Web: shahabalizadeh.artstation.com



S H A H A B | A L I Z A D E H





TOM LOPEZ



Long Snouted Quill Lion

Tom Lopez

Year created: 2015

Web: tomlopez.artstation.com





Travelling Gear

Michele Giorgi

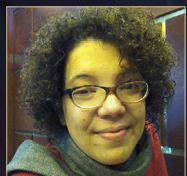
Year created: 2015

Web: michelegiorgiillustrator.com

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Decryptor

Tamires Para

Year created: 2015

Web: tamirespara.com



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Alone in His Cave

Kris Jay Robinson

Software used: Photoshop CS6

Web: dialkris.wix.com/krisconceptartist

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beginner's guide to sketching

characters, creatures & concepts

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Mini-Brief: Design and paint an original time-travelling character! (Remember, your image should be entirely your own work and not use fan art)

The Artist



Danilo Lombardo

danilolombardo.allyou.net

Software Used:

Photoshop

Danilo Lombardo is a self taught freelance 3D artist from Palermo, Italy. He works mainly on light and environment modeling but designs vehicles and organic or hard surface props.

Speed paint from real life references

Discover speed painting in ArtRage with this tutorial on creating a detailed urban scene using real life references from Danilo Lombardo [▶](#)





Get tips for painting a quick color sketch using ArtRage...

In this chapter I will show you my method for capturing fast environment sketches using ArtRage. In 3D I usually work on environments and sets, so lighting is very important to me, because it allows you to add depth and believability, as well as creating the desired mood or suggest an emotion needed for storytelling purposes.

I find quick color sketches vital, before lighting a 3D shot, which is an expensive task in terms of time and computing, and it's necessary to visualize the lighting earlier by doing some preliminary 2D color keys.

Light was a major subject for the traditional Impressionist painters, and they were trying to depict the variety of nature using a vibrant combination of tones and colors to suggest at first impact the subject and what the feeling of the particular lighting condition was like.

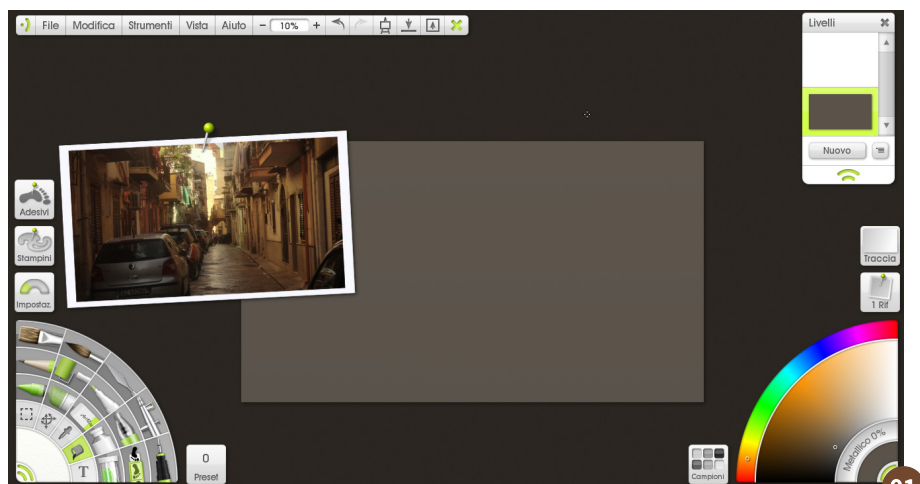
To realize a descriptive but quick sketch we will use a synthesis technique where details will only be suggested to the observer, using fast strokes and the right tone combinations. This was the technique used by Macchiaioli painters, whose paintings attempted to capture natural light, shade and color.

They were the Italian counterpart of the Impressionists and 'macchia' in Italian means 'stain', or 'spot'. This exercise is good to study how light behaves in real life and how it can affect colors. The synthesis process will force us to focus only on the primary shapes and elements of the composition, and will improve our perceptive capability.

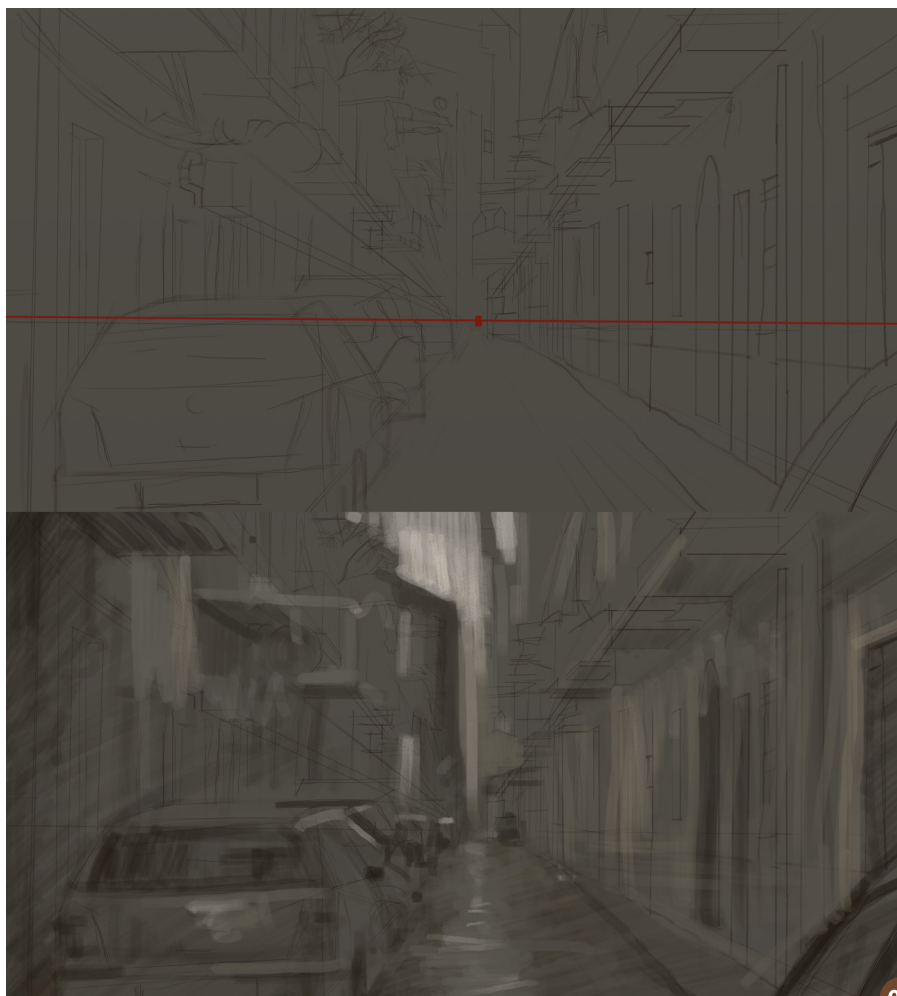
01 Setting the document: The main software used in this tutorial will be ArtRage because I think it has some very nice and easy tools and I will be using a mixed technique. The reference is a photo taken by me in Palermo, my native city.

First I set up my document in ArtRage with 7,000 pixels width and 3,900 height; multiple times the size of my photo reference, I set the document very large so I can work with a nice resolution and get an extra bit of definition when I will later resize my image.

Using the reference panel I then import my photo inside the software. I like to start by filling a layer with a flat gray. This allows me to have a better contrast between the colors and the canvas.



01



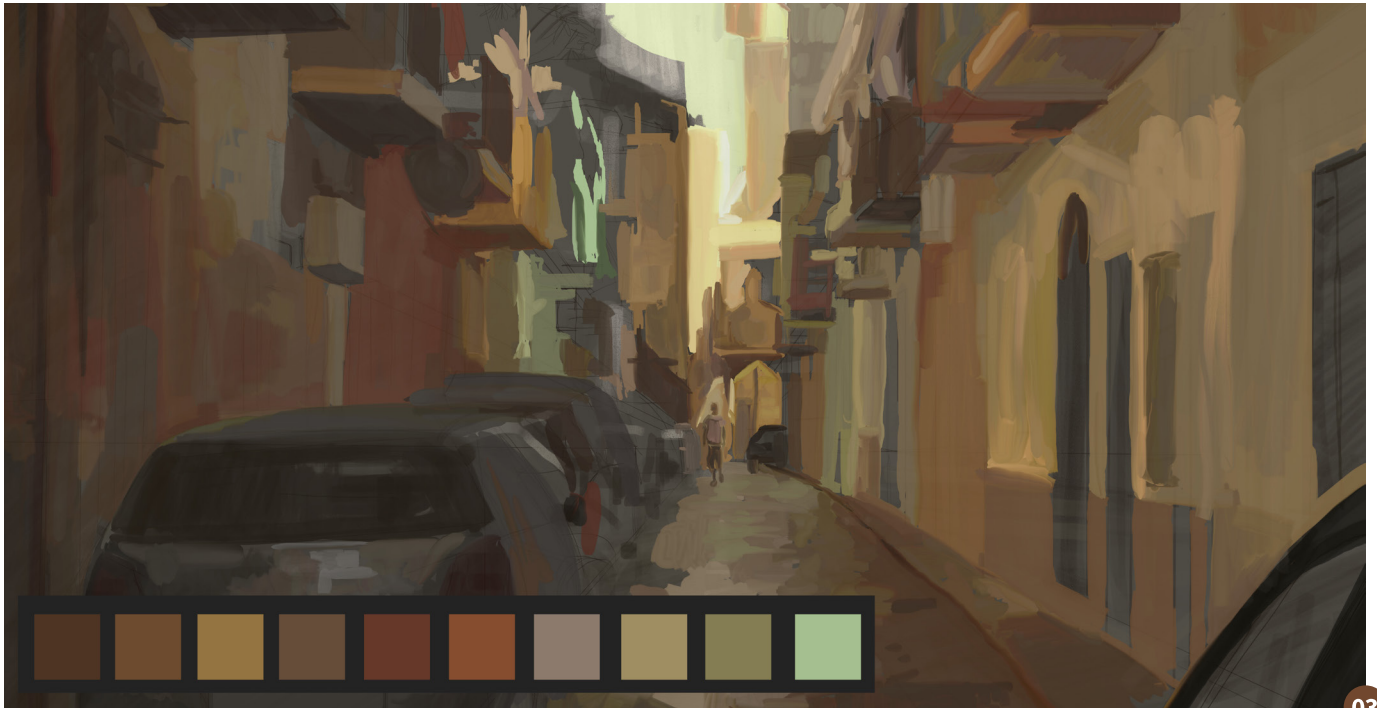
02

02 Initial sketch: I find it useful to start evaluating the image by doing a preliminary sketch. This will become a guideline to place all the elements in the space.

I start by tracing a line to find the horizon and a quick mark representing my focal point. I use a rough central perspective to draw all my principal lines with the Hard and Dark pencil preset. It's important to modulate the line to give a sense of depth, so the foreground will have a heavier trait than the background.

The huge amount of detail can be represented by abstracting the shapes in simple lines and marks. On a second layer, I do a very quick shading just to gain some information about the major shadows, mid-tones and highlights using the Hard Shader pencil.

03 Color blocking: At this stage I try to focus on light, contrast and values. The values are the range of brightness in an image, from dark to white. It's important to not work at full size; to keep having an overview, and



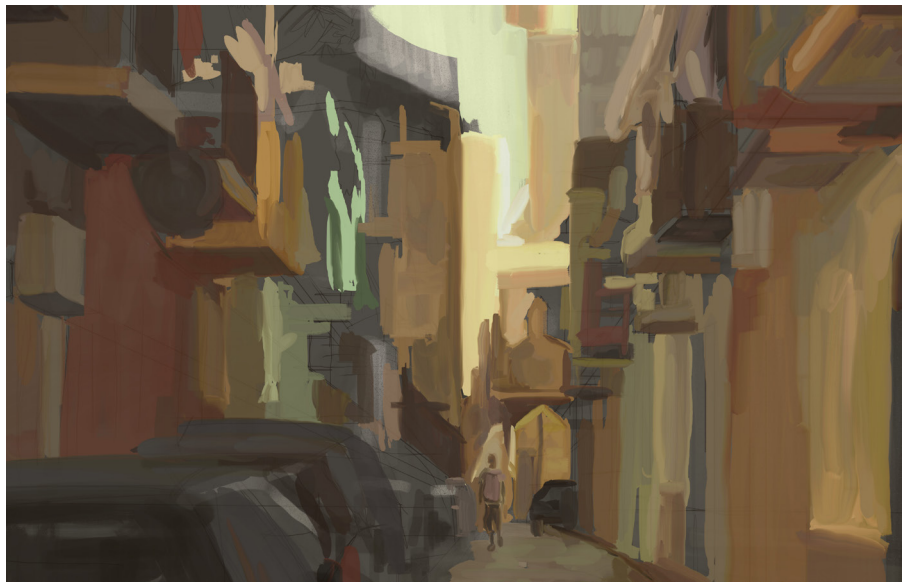
03

use broad strokes. I use the oil brush tool on a separate level with 70% opacity. Instead of doing a perfect representation of light we will use this scale to represent a 'feeling' of lighting.

I start by deciding on my initial palette guide; observing the reference to extract all the important colors. Then I use these colors to paint a simplification of the scene, looking in particular at light and shadows.

04 Lighting and values: It is crucial to observe and understand the right values relationship between colors. When a ray of light hits a surface it bounces all over until it stops, so in terms of color everything is influenced by this light bouncing; even the stronger shadows.

In this process it is important to not over saturate the tones on strong highlights and shadows, ►



04

- 01** ArtRage has a nice, clean user interface and you can hide it completely by right-clicking any part of the screen
- 02** Here you can see the progression of Danilo's quick pencil sketch
- 03** Fast, broad strokes achieve this first impression of colors. A limited my palette at this stage helps with precision
- 04** Comparing the reference and the painting there are details missing, but the major color spots are in place



05

“I introduce a stronger contrast between the foreground and the background using shadows and I paint more graduations of color in the mid-tone range”

because this can distract our eyes, and make us have less control.

Everything needs to transmit a sense of blending as it is light that dominates color, so we can't always represent blue using blue or red using red, under different lighting conditions. We have to understand and study where the light is coming from, and how and why it is reflecting in a certain way on a certain surface, to be able to simplify it. This image is made primarily of warm tones, but we can introduce cold tones like greens and blues to create vibrant and playful lighting. Instead of using white for pure light I use a very light green.

05 Depth and contrast: To test the rough blocking I have at this point, I start to cut some elements from the background. On another layer I paint only some of the major lines and colors with the intention of adding depth and contrast to the painting. I focus on some secondary elements like doors and plants; I start refining the cars and some buildings and I introduce stronger shadows.

I also use a few dark, hard lines, to suggest the shape of objects and to increase the depth of my image. Using a diversification of intensity in the



06



07



08

lines, we can suggest the motion of the shapes we are drawing. I try to use only those strong predominant lines that will help me create the illusion of depth.

06 Glazing with layers and opacity: We can uniform our painting by applying some glazing to blend all the tones together. To do this, I create a new layer on top of my stack with an opacity set to something like 40%. I will need this to paint those elements that I want to be on top of the first blocking, and to level all of my tones.

I introduce a stronger contrast between the foreground and the background using shadows, and I paint some more graduations of color in the mid-tone range. On another layer (at 20% opacity) I finish this kind of polishing by adding warmer tones.

07 Refining color blocking: At this point I have used only the Oil brush, because I personally like its behavior in this kind of sketch, however ArtRage offers a wide range of tools and you should not feel limited from exploring more.

In my opinion the Pencil tool works perfectly along with oils for my method. I create another layer and this time using the Hard Shader pencil preset I paint some correction on top of my work.

Looking at the reference and working with a zoomed out canvas I can gain that first impact and correct those things that keep breaking the uniformity of my painting. I introduce some shadows and lights to enhance depth, and paint some more values trying to improve the ground and the reflection effect on it. The goal here is to refine the 'first impression' of the painting and make it look uniform.

08 Tertiary shapes: My color sketch at this point is very dirty, and it represents only the major forms (primary and secondary shapes like walls, doors, windows, and ground and so on) but it's missing all the details on the windows, doors, and cables. ►

05 Try to do the rough blocking as soon as possible, so you can evaluate if a sketch will work

06 The glazing layer and the result of it

07 The Pencil tool does a great job for making the colors uniform and adding more precision

08 Once you have the bases, this is where the image details can finally come out



We need to stay dirty, and not make all the individual details, but instead give some hints to the viewer on how things are in a more complete, general way. Having all the primary shapes sketched out will make it very easy to add many details later (tertiary shapes). I accentuate some strong points like the lines of the car silhouettes, or on the sidewalk, to make some elements, and the space itself, more readable.

09 Sign and style: Even if we are just copying from a photo, and I personally look at it like an exercise to develop skills, understand light and be able to draw more personal concepts, we can introduce our 'signature' or 'style' embedded in the visual language of the image. All the lines, dots, and strokes, are pieces of the grammar of the painting.

Style is an important aspect to take into consideration when we are dealing with a fast work like this, and we can use our stylistic choices to be even more fast and dirty, while maintaining a good aesthetic and keep the image interesting.

10 Photoshop and final conclusions: In ArtRage, I export my image in PNG format and then I import it in to Photoshop. On a layer set to Multiply with 57% opacity, I import a 'grunge texture' from www.textures.com. I use it to add a universal shadowing on the foreground,

and then I use the eraser to delete the upper parts of the texture.

I do the same process to add a general light, a sort of fast glow on the upper part of the image, but this time my merging mode is set to Screen. On a separate layer I paint a fast 'fog' to separate the buildings in the distance and I refine the ground reflection. My image is a little bit too red so I add a Color Correction layer to adjust the tones and saturation and make it more yellowish.

In my opinion the goal of practicing speed painting is not to be a faster painter. Concept art is not about perfect paintings, but it is more about design, about building a visual language to communicate a story.

To do research on shapes, colors, patterns, character design, and lighting, it's important to be able to explore as many variants as possible, so speed is a tool you can use to communicate an idea quickly to yourself or your team. This was just my method and my opinions and I hope you will find it useful for your daily practice. ●

09 This is how the image looks when zoomed in. It's all made up by fast marks and signs

10 Layers of final texturing and highlighting, and the final result of the Color Correction layer complete the image

⚡ PRO TIPS

Observe and learn

As an artist you have to observe and contemplate the reality as much as you can. This should be a constant process of analyzing and learning. Even if you are creating imaginary worlds, our human reality is the biggest source of inspiration that could exist.

Classical or digital

Digital art is great and the possibilities are endless with computers. However, these are tools, and it's good to make some time to study classical masters, and draw from real life. These things are the ABC of doing any kind of figurative art.

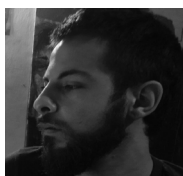


09



10

The Artist



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Issue 121 | January 2016

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The Artist



Wendy Yoon

wendyyoon.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Wendy Yoon is a freelance concept artist and illustrator from California, USA currently working in the film and games industry. She specializes in creating character, creature, and environment designs.



Paint an elfin warrior

Freelance concept artist Wendy Yoon shows how simple techniques for creating light can enhance the atmosphere of your illustrations ▶

Discover top tips for painting a simple fantasy scene...

In this tutorial, I will be covering the basics of creating a fantasy scene featuring a warrior elf character in a woodland setting. Throughout my process, there will be an emphasis on light and color and how they are used to define many elements within the scene.

Light doesn't just describe form, but provides us with literally every bit of visual information that surrounds us. The colors we see and the properties that define materials all rely on the influence of the light that is to be conveyed.

I want to show you some of the many different ways you can use the properties of light to enhance your knowledge of the materials indicated in an artwork as well as an understanding of how light behaves. I will also be showing you some of the tools and techniques that I use in Photoshop as well as some of the technical understanding I have acquired over the years as an artist.

We will be walking through my process starting from the initial black-and-white

composition all the way through to the final painting. Along the way, I'll demonstrate how light is used to describe the forms and how values can be manipulated to make your image read more clearly. By the end of this tutorial, you should have a good grasp on how to approach your illustrations in a thoughtful and deliberate manner. I really enjoy creating illustrations like this and I hope you will have just as much fun using light and color to enhance your own work. Let's get started!

01 Loose black-and-white composition: I am starting off with a black-and-white thumbnail to find the composition of my painting. My goal is to divide the frame up in a way that is both interesting and engaging to the viewer. Remember to keep it simple and loose as it's easy to get lost in the process of detailing things out.

I usually go through several different thumbnails before I commit to any one of them in particular. Keep in mind that things can always be changed later and you don't want to be stuck with a bad composition. The pose of the character is also extremely important in bringing the illustration to life. I want my character to be 'caught in a moment', so to speak.

02 Simple line sketch: Now that I have chosen the composition that I want, I move on to creating a simple line sketch to use as a guide for painting. It is important that the anatomy and perspective in this step are accurate. Having a bad foundation can undermine any great painting!

I am using a small pixelated brush to describe just enough of the scene which I can then use as my sketch overlay. I have most of the design figured out but it's still very loose.

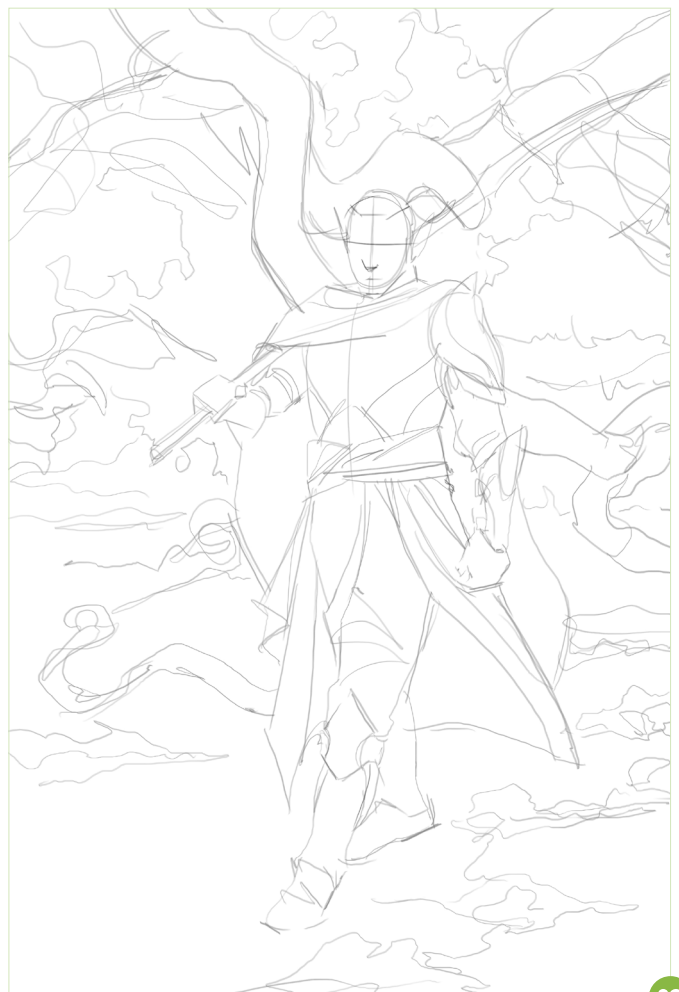
I am also drawing in the background as well, focusing on overlapping shapes to create visual interest. I want to ensure that the viewer's eye is constantly moving around the image. The worst thing you can do is leave open areas in your composition where the eye can 'leave the frame' ►

01 Explore the composition and pose of the character while placing an emphasis on keeping the thumbnail loose and simple

02 This line sketch that will guide you through the rest of the painting, defining the major landmarks in the scene



01



02



03 Setting up the color palette: I set my sketch layer to the layer mode Multiply and change the opacity to somewhere around 30%. This allows me to see the sketch as I work. I create another layer below it to set up the color palette for the painting and fill it with a warm base color.

I am starting with the background to help define the environment as it will influence the character that inhabits it. I also create separate layers for each element, starting with the background, tree elements, forest floor, and finally the character himself.

I use large brushstrokes to lay in the sky, tree, and ground floor. I am also using a variety of textured brushes to break up the clean feeling that the painting is starting to have. It's okay to be messy at this stage! Refinement will happen later in the process.

04 Blocking it in: Now I have established the color palette, I start blocking in the layers from the previous step. This is where I begin to refine all of the individual elements that make up the scene. The background is already mostly blocked in so I focus on the character, adding some definition to his face and costume.

I quickly add in a couple of defining 'elfin' features such as pointy ears and long hair. I also paint in some very basic values to separate the components from one another. I am using values here to describe the relative position of objects in the image. For example, the way in which the cloth hanging off the character's waist overlaps with itself, creating a sense of depth.

05 Painting the light: Now that I have blocked in some simple values, it's time to determine the light source and push the scene even





06

further. This is also where I figure out where my shadows and highlights go. I have settled on the light source as being somewhere to the left of the frame from behind the viewer.

I also further refine the background, detailing in the foliage and the branches of the tree. Now that this is established, I can define my light shapes based on the environmental influences. Because this character is in a forest, I think it would be appropriate to use the effect of dappled light. Dappled light is the result of sunlight passing through the canopy of a tree, creating a 'spotty' pattern of light and shadow. This gives me the opportunity to design the light shapes affecting my character and his environment.

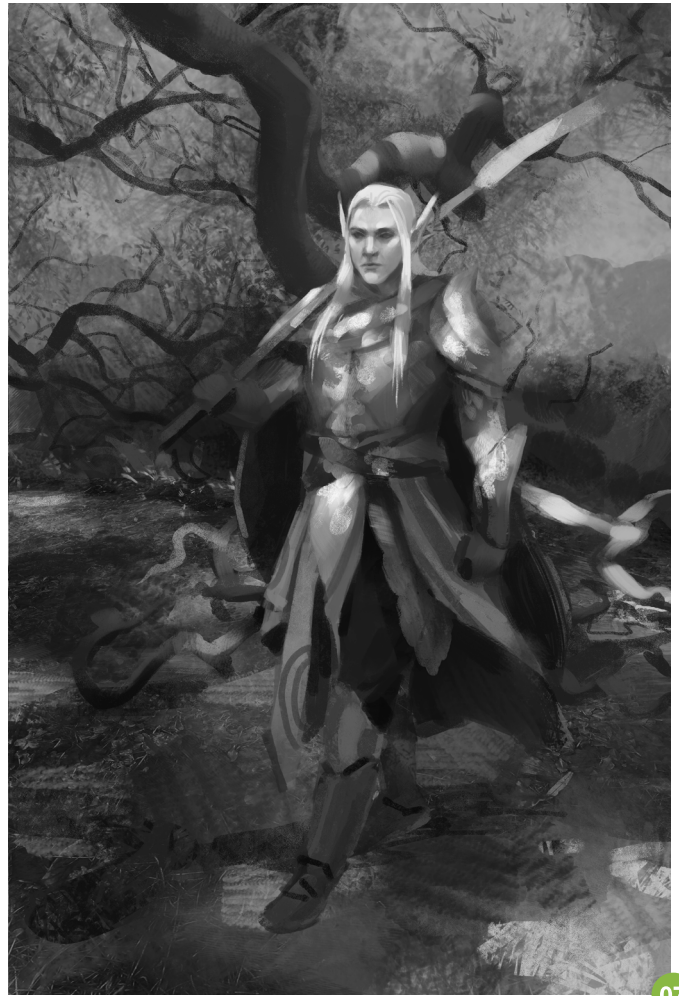
In addition to the sunlight, we have other minor sources of light that we need to consider such as fill light and bounce light. In this instance, the fill light in this scene is blue from the light reflected from the sky onto the shadow areas. This is why our shadows are never fully black but dependent upon different sources of light.

06 Rendering skin and subsurface scattering: Now I take a look at the face and see how it can be made to read more like

real skin. Skin is semi-translucent, allowing light to enter it and illuminate it. The glow that results of this is called subsurface scattering and is most noticeable when you hold your hand up to a source of light such as the sun. The edges of your fingers become illuminated from the light behind it and glow red.

In this scene, I want to show how the inner part of the character's ear is thinner and allows more light to pass through it, to demonstrate the effect of subsurface scattering and give it the red color. I also finish defining the rest of the face, adding highlights to the bridge of the nose, the cheekbones, the tips of the ears, and the forehead. These areas are the high points that typically reflect the most light.

07 Checking values: Periodically checking your values is important in preventing certain areas of the painting from becoming too muddy and blending into each other. Values are the lightness or darkness of colors. I create a Black & White adjustment layer in Photoshop and move it to the top of my layer stack so that I can easily find it. This converts my painting into a grayscale image, which helps me see the values better. I toggle this layer on and off as I



07

work throughout the entire process so that I can be sure that the changes I'm making contribute to the painting as a whole. I want to be making deliberate choices in where I place my values. As you come to understand values better, you will ►

- 03** Using large brushstrokes, lay down the foundation of color to establish the overall palette and feel of the image
- 04** Blocking in the rest of the painting by focusing on a basic range of values will help to define form
- 05** Determine the light source to nail down the placement of the highlights and shadows from the character and his gear
- 06** Illuminating the thinnest part of the ear demonstrates the effect of subsurface scattering caused by light penetrating the skin
- 07** Use the black-and-white adjustment layer for a quick and easy way to analyze the values of the painting



08

need to use this feature less often as using values will become second nature.

I don't want all of my values to be in the same range as the image would not have any contrast. My goal for this piece is to have the character separate from the background without feeling like he's floating in front of it.

08 Indicating materials: Armor and fabric: I continue to detail out the rest of the character, focusing on the armor and fabric for this step. I finish designing the rest of the weapon, taking care to find good references online to make it look believable.

I'm cleaning up some shapes such as the blade and his boots, giving them more definition. I also punch up the values on the boots, making them stand out from the background. Next up, I paint in the fabric, such as the cloak and the sash around his waist.

Fabric typically doesn't have strong highlights unless it's something shiny like silk. In this case, it's soft and diffused with smooth transitions between the light and dark areas.

09 Indicating materials: Metal: I decide to paint in a belt to break up the empty



09

PRO TIPS

The importance of reference

The internet is convenient for providing thousands of images you can reference for a single object. The difficulty is choosing which will benefit you the most. For example, many photos are taken in artificial studio lighting so while this might be useful for designs, the lighting information will be inaccurate.

I frequently shoot my own references to get exactly what I'm looking for. I don't have swords lying around my house but I can easily take a butter knife outside and photograph it in natural light so that the reference will be more accurate for my scene.

Observing from life and studies

Pay attention to the world around you and observe how light interacts with your environment. Go outside on a sunny day and see all the ways that light bounces around your environment. For example, look at the light bouncing off of grass and onto the side of a house or the way a car's paint reflects highlights.

Try to look for subtle differences in color across a variety of surfaces. As an artist, it's important to build your visual library of light and color. You should also do studies to see how other artists approach different subjects in their pieces.

area on the chest to create some visual interest. Typically, elves are depicted as having very ornate yet organic designs in their culture. In order to illustrate those qualities, I also start detailing in some scrollwork on the blade as well as the metal armor. I add a strong highlight to the cutting

edge of the blade, therefore creating form and dimension on the weapon.

This is also the point where I give the back edge of the blade a shadow as that part of the weapon is not directly facing the light. I'm also thinking

about how the surface of the armor would be worn down over time and lose its luster. The rougher a surface is, the softer the reflection of light will be.

10 Background refinement: The background is looking a little bare so I shift my focus from the character to the rest of the scene. I create the illusion of a dense, overgrown forest by populating it with additional foliage and branches. I also punch up the value of the sky to create contrast between the leaves and the trees. I originally wanted a leaf strewn dirt floor but I decide to change it to a lush, moss carpet to emphasize the forest theme. This is an example of how things can change throughout the process. Don't get too attached to your initial sketch or be afraid to mix it up!

11 Aging and additional details: Aging and battle damage are more details that you can use to add an additional layer of believability to your image. Important points to consider are: Where is your character most likely to get hit? Which parts of the armor or costume will be subjected to the most wear and tear?

I paint in some fraying threads on the edges of the cloak and waist sash, as those are areas that would get caught on things like thorns and bushes. I'm also considering areas where I can add dents and scratches on the armor; most notably the pauldrons, the chest piece, and the vambraces. I paint in some splatters of dried blood for fun; maybe my character had gotten into a confrontation with a nasty creature. I also notice a tangent between the right ear and the blade of his weapon creating an area of visual tension. I decide to extend the ears a little to resolve it.

12 Creating atmospheric effects: Now that the scene is finally coming together, I add some quick, atmospheric effects using some Photoshop features to further enhance ►

08 Finalize the armor and smooth the cloth to look more realistic

09 Blade and armor detail emphasize the elfin qualities

10 More vegetation to the ground and canopy suggests a lush forest

11 Dirt, scratches, dents, and blood give a sense of history

12 Atmospheric effects select areas of focus





the lighting. I use the gradient tool (specifically the Linear gradient) at 18% opacity to do a quick 'wash' of light behind the character to cause the background to recede. I am using a pastel yellow to bring back some of the warmth from the sun.

I change the layer mode to Soft Light and use an airbrush to erase out any unnecessary areas. This effect also simulates the haze in the air. I also use a speckled brush to paint in some of the dust particles that would be illuminated by the sunbeams piercing through the foliage.

13 Using Color Dodge: Color Dodge is an easy way to add areas of illumination to your image. I use an airbrush set to a low opacity of about 30% to bring in some additional spots of light to parts of the armor and the weapon. I focus on the areas that would receive the most light such as the raised parts on the chest piece, vambraces, and pauldron. I change the color of the brush to a light pink and add some Color Dodge to the area between his ear and cheeks. This pushes the subsurface scattering effect and also adds in some more saturation.

14 Levels and color adjustments: These are going to be some minor tweaks and adjustments to enhance what I've already done. Through this step, I'm going to use several different adjustment layers including Levels, Color Balance, and Gradient Map.

Adjustment layers are a great non-destructive way to make changes to your work without permanently altering the original. I start by using the Levels adjustment layer to fine tune some of the contrast and to make the scene brighter.

I now move onto the Color Balance adjustment layer to remove some of the blue tint by moving the red and yellow sliders over to make the image warmer. I use a red and teal Gradient Map on an overlay layer mode at 8% opacity to push some of the reds.

15 Last minute fixes: We're not done just yet! This final step is where I'll do some minor painting to fill in some of the details that I think the image is missing. The front boot and pants look a little flat so I paint them a bit more to



give it that extra layer of dimension that I think is missing. I'm also adding in an additional layer of grass that I wanted this environment to have.

The great thing is that all of my colors and values have been established so I can sample from the areas that have already been painted. I really enjoy this step because I don't have to think too much about what I'm doing and I get to have fun coming up with all of the little bits and pieces. The image is looking a bit too red, so I decide to go back to my Color Balance adjustment layer to dial it back a bit. For the final touch, I flatten the image and use the Unsharp mask filter to sharpen the details. ●

13 Color Dodge is a versatile tool that can amplify the brightness on an already lit area such as the highlights

14 Adjustment layers create an opportunity to make non-destructive changes to the colors, values, and tones that are already present in the image

The Artist



Wendy Yoon
wendyyoon.com





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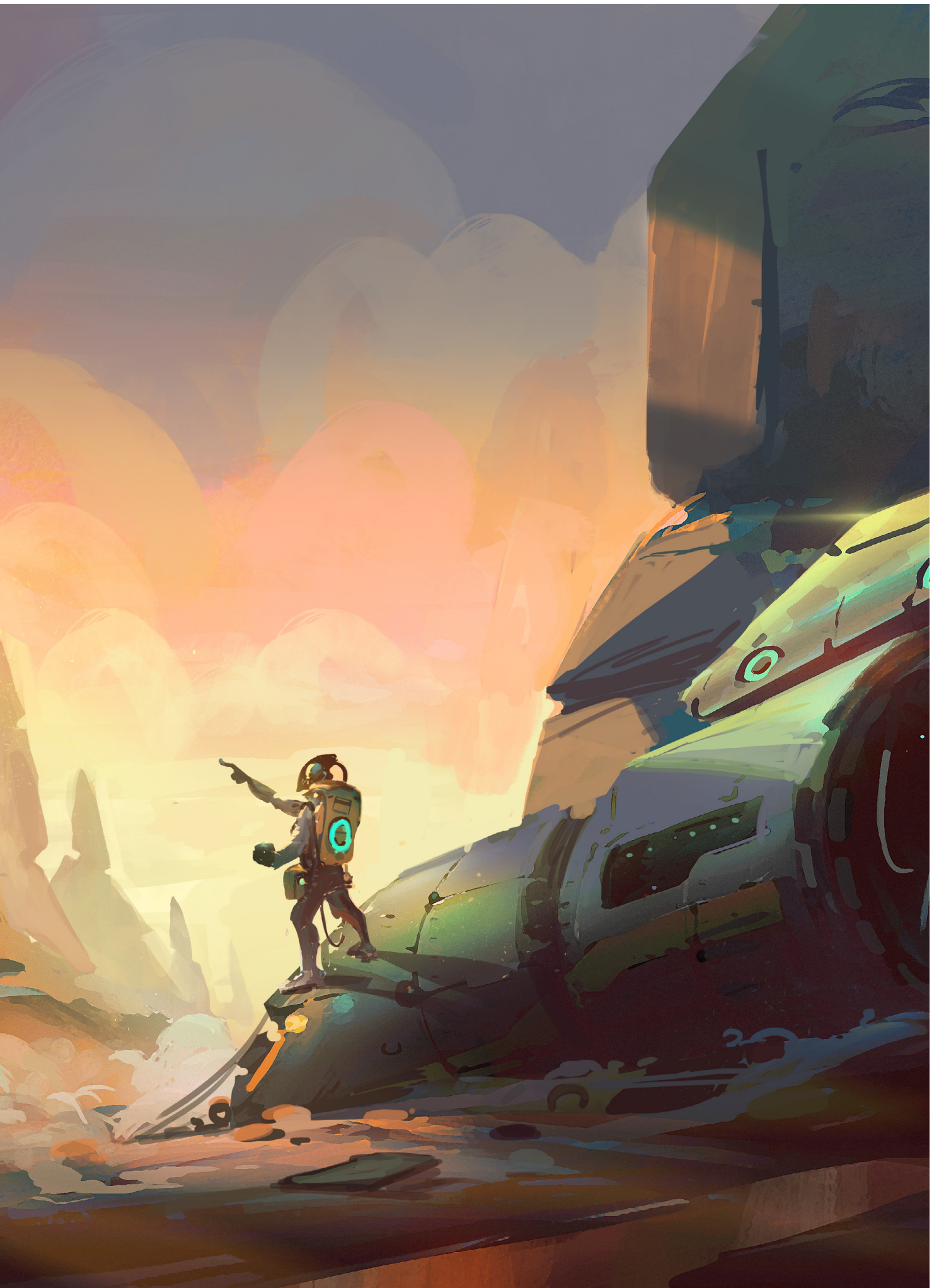
Software Used:
Photoshop

Juan Novelletto is a senior concept artist at NGD Studios, developing the *Master of Orion* reboot, and art director at the indie games studio Nastycloud. He is based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Creating a sci-fi composition

Senior concept artist Juan Novelletto shows how to compose a strong sci-fi scene [▶](#)





Learn the fundamentals of sci-fi concept art...

This is the first in a series of five tutorials where I'll show you my process to create a piece of sci-fi concept art in its entirety; from the management of the composition, values and perspective, to the finishing touches of special effects. This first tutorial aims to focus on the composition of a concept, and will have a large theoretical load with some Photoshop tricks. You will learn to generate compositions quickly, without losing your concept objective.

Composition is a fundamental way to convey an idea in a practical way; therefore it is important that you can master it to be able to better communicate your idea to the viewer. To get to a good composition, most of the

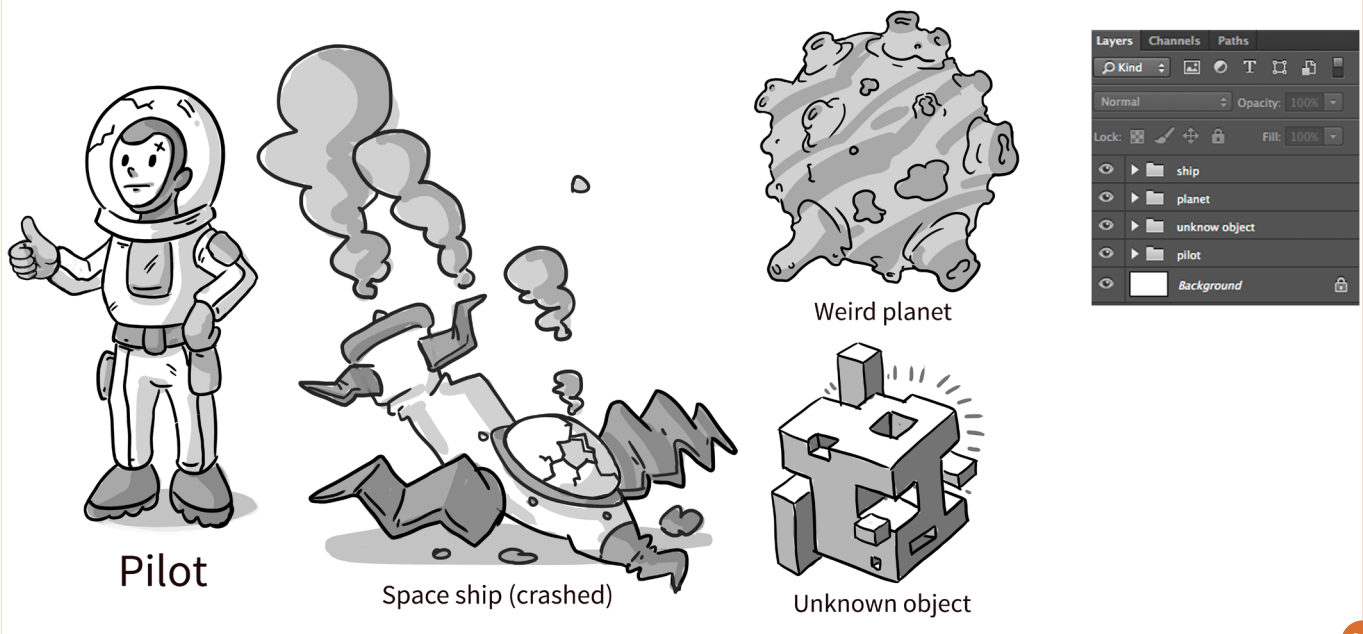
time, it is important that you iterate an idea so that the end result is the best possible one.

In this case, I will show you one of the most common processes and the one I use the most; generating small images (usually known as thumbnails) with a few values, forms and basic silhouettes. But before this it is important to know some basic composition rules; for example, that the scale of an object is correct, or that the viewer's attention can be guided to exactly where you want it to, or that all the elements are in harmony on the canvas. In addition you will also see how the color palette can alter a composition, and can be varied, to generate different feelings.

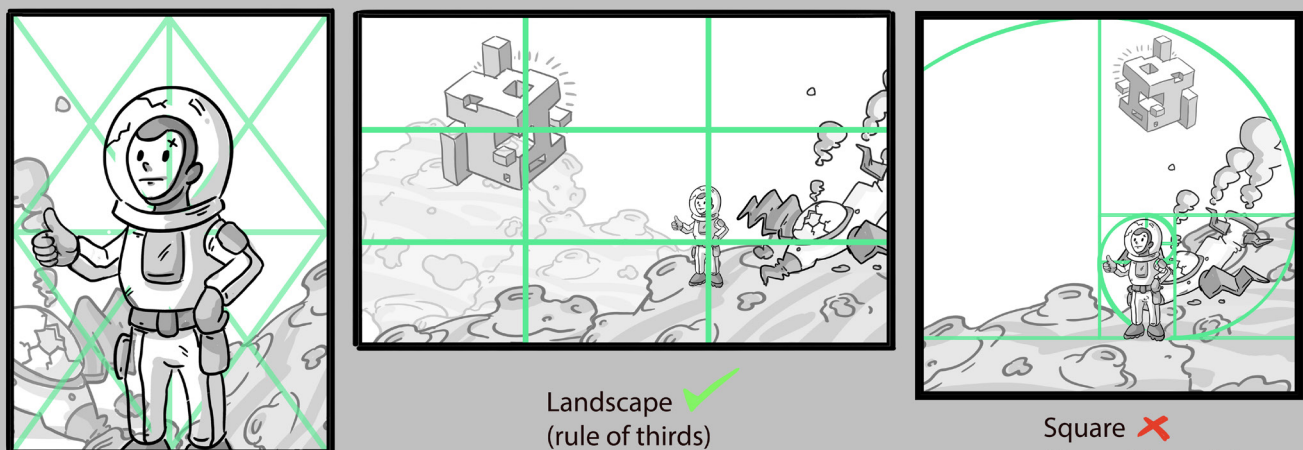
01 Idea elements: It may seem very simple but it is important that before starting

a concept, even from the first sketches, to have any idea of what you are going to do. Since we are working on a sci-fi piece, we can take many liberties where we couldn't in something like an historical concept.

When we are facing the realization of a concept, various situations may arise: what you do may be part of a well known concept or you may have a design document showing you how you must work each element. In this case I'm going to take the liberty of making something from scratch, but I want to convey in the same image several things: a world with particular forms, an event that happened, the possible cause of this event, and generate some mystery. Playing with the uncertainty is something that gives true dialogue to a concept, since in a way you are talking to the person looking at the piece, making them ask

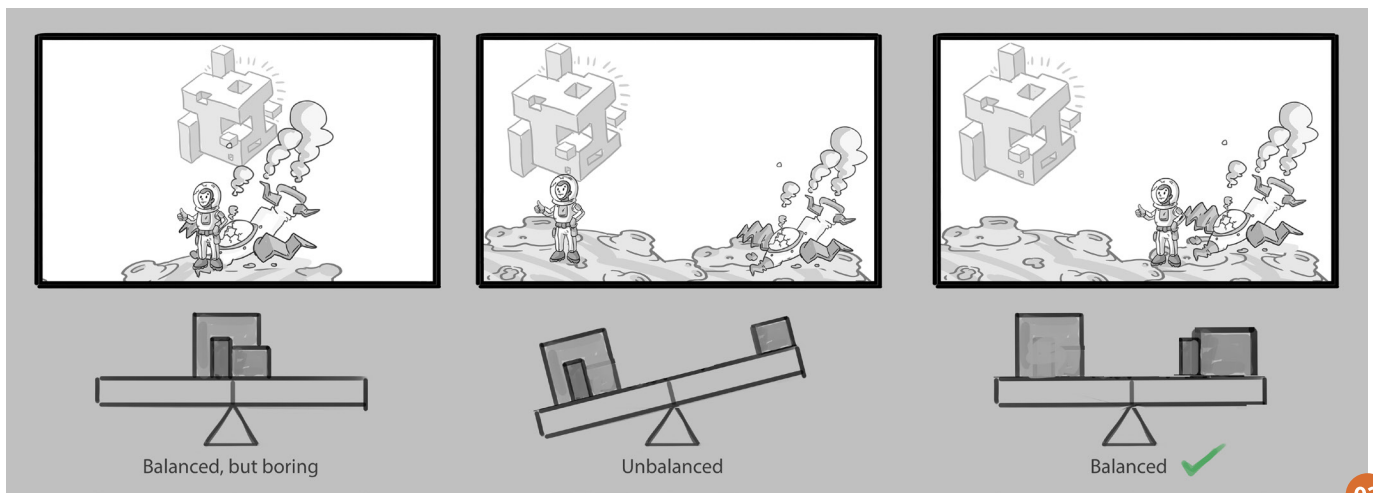


01



Kinds of frames and compositions

02



03

“With a frame type landscape, and the rule of three, I have a fairly classical composition for a sci-fi environment”

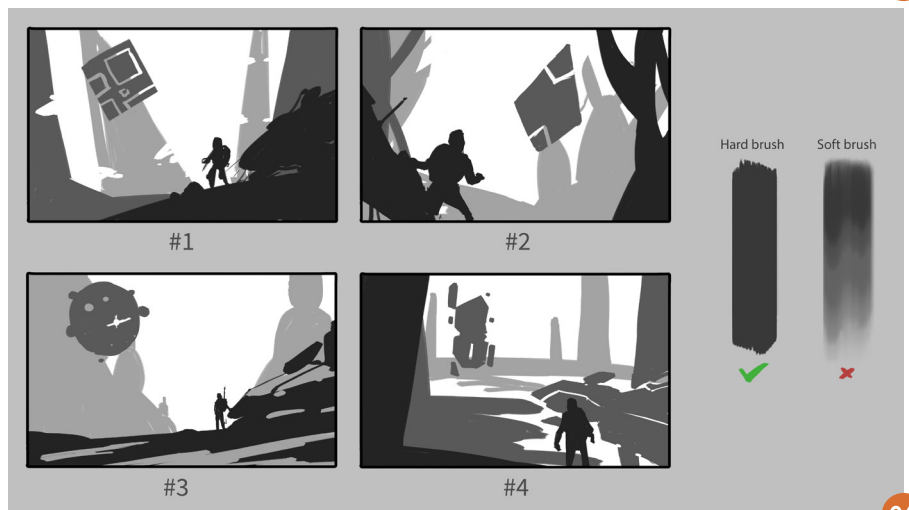
‘what happened?’ So the elements which make up this concept are as follows: a strange planet, an unknown object (of large dimensions), a crashed ship, and its pilot (unharmful luckily but with some scratches!)

02 Examples of composition and frames:

As a first step, now that you have the elements that compose your concept, choose how you are going to frame this idea and what kind of composition is the most appropriate. There are many types of composition, such as the iconic, the rule of three, or the golden rule, among others. Each has a purpose and a way to be different. For example, in the iconic compositions (used especially in sacral painting) the human figure is in the center of the image. In addition you also have the proportion and orientation of our frame to consider, which can be portrait, landscape or square.

In my case, there are two elements that I want to stand out which are the ship and its pilot on one side and the unknown object of large dimensions on the other, as well as showing a large part of this weird world. With a frame type landscape, and the rule of three, I have a fairly classical composition for a sci-fi environment. The elements that are at the intersections of the composition lines are those that will have more weight, but I will delve into that later.

03 Balance of the composition: The main elements that make up the concept must be located within the canvas in a way that does not generate an imbalance. Everything should be in balance so that the composition works correctly, and to do this we need to know that each object within the canvas varies its weight



04

according to its size and position. If we put our pilot and his ship in the middle, we should locate also the weird object in the middle so it is all balance; if we imagine weighing scales, the weight of this composition is all in the center.

You can play with different thumbnails to see how the composition varies when you move and scale the elements. If I locate the foreign object and the pilot to the left, and the ship to the right, the balance will give more weight to the elements of the left. If I move the driver to the right and scale the ship, the composition will remain balanced as the weights are distributed in a balanced way in the canvas.

04 Thumbnail creation: Thumbnails are a quick way to try out different options for a concept. While I have already chosen how to locate elements on the canvas, I can still change the angles and distances. I create four options, but there are no limits to the number you can create. In my experience between 6 and 8 thumbnails are enough, but sometimes the idea is clear with only three. I work thumbnails with only three values to keep a clear and simple composition, and also that the silhouettes

are well visible. I leave darker values for the foreground, the mid values for the mid-ground with the lighters for the background. In each of these four thumbnails I try different things; in some of them the geometric forms are very clear while in others the camera is further away. I try and iterate the composition many times to meet with compliant results. ▶

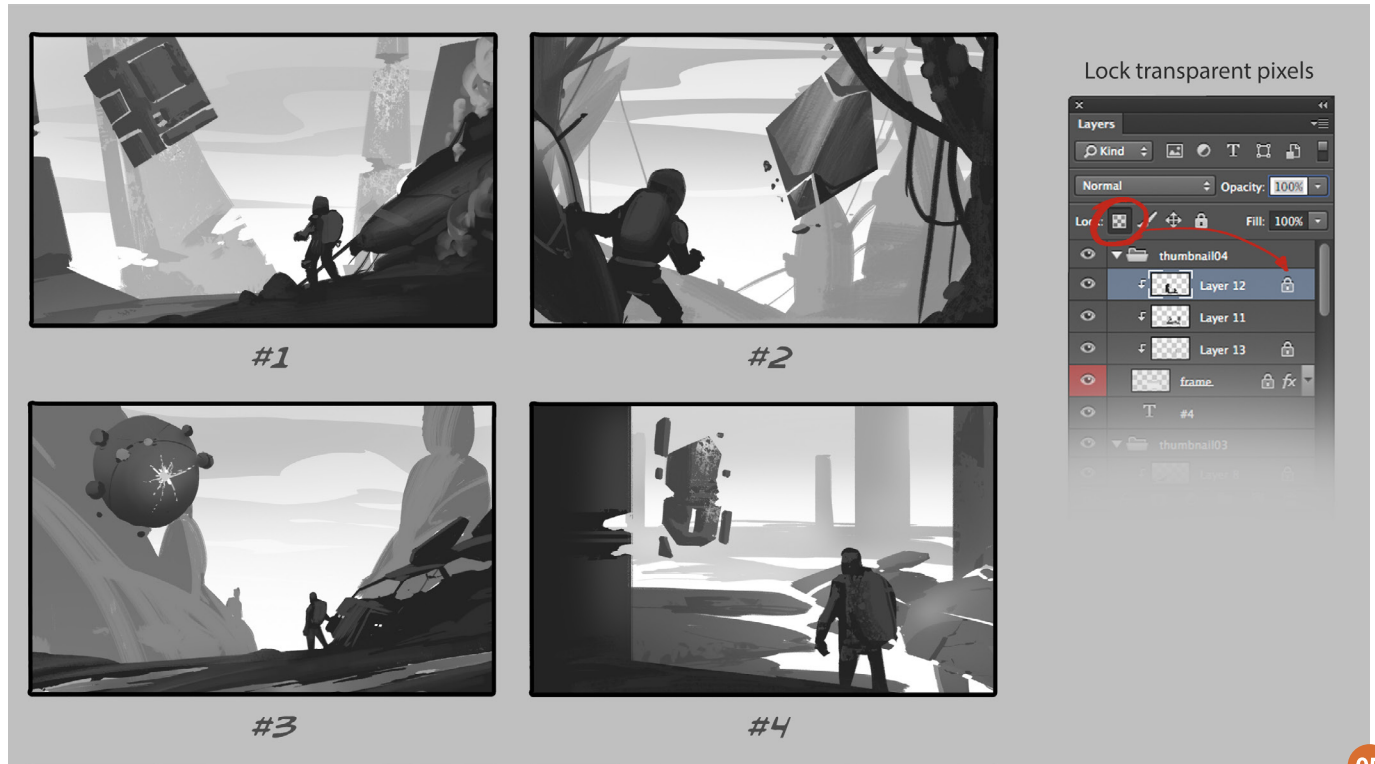
- 01** Having the main elements of the concept separated in layers will let you quickly play later with the composition
- 02** Find an arrangement where both the pilot and the planet stand out in the composition
- 03** The same elements change the composition simply by being moved or scaled, making it either imbalanced or in harmony
- 04** These thumbnails are basic but have a visible composition that can be used later

05 Refining thumbnails: I continue to work on the four thumbnails that I did in the previous step. To work quickly in the silhouettes, it is important to use the Lock Transparent Pixels option in each of the layers. With this I can make big brushstrokes without getting out of the silhouettes. To the three original values I add new values to generate

better volumes and suggest an ambient light, in a very vague way. Another thing I do is refine the silhouettes and add more details such as small stones, or lianas vines in the case of thumbnail 2.

I try to be free without changing too much about the elements for example in thumbnail 4 I transform the ship in a part of the land, taking

it out of the composition. Remember that the idea of the thumbnails is to reach the best possible composition, and it doesn't matter if in the process a part of our idea changes. The thumbnails are beginning to have more shape, but still I need to define more dramatic lights, and focal points that I am going to use to guide the gaze of whoever is viewing the concept.

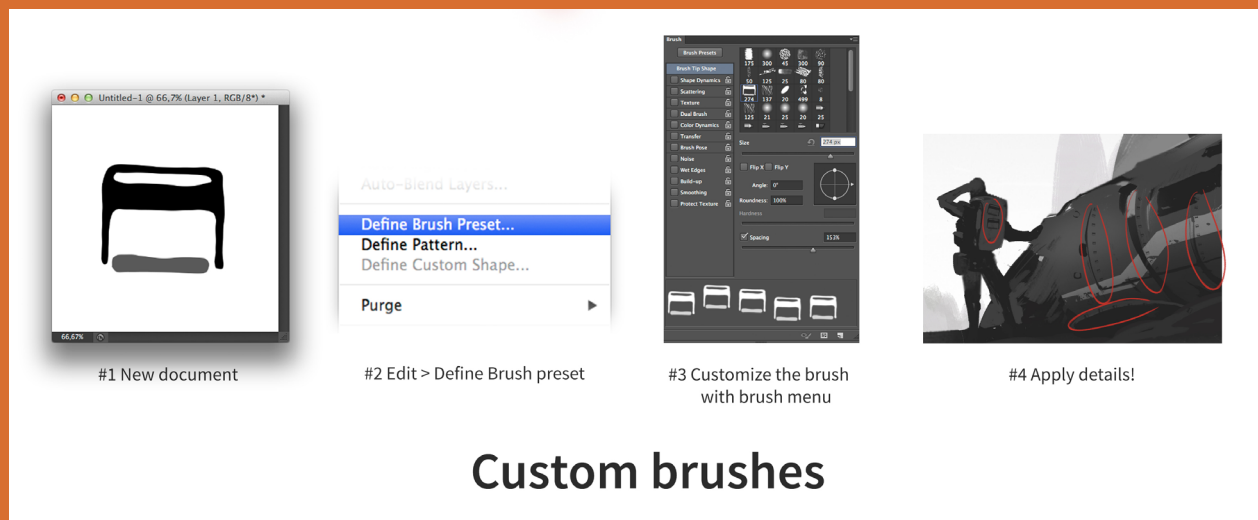


05

⚡ TOOL GUIDE

Define the brush preset

Sometimes it is necessary to create a custom brush to give more detail to an area, or generate a pattern. In this case I want to create a few rivets in the destroyed ship, and repeat it at some other place like the backpack of the pilot. I create an image in a new document, which must be in grayscale, being white with has opacity 0% on the brush and black with an opacity of 100%. Once the image for the brush is ready, go to Edit and then select the option Define Brush Preset, press OK, and it's done! Then in the brush menu I can change some settings to define the brush.



Custom brushes



06

06 Choose a thumbnail: I complete the thumbnails process selecting one from among all that I have made. Each of them have something interesting, but the composition that I like and I think that better reflects the idea that I thought of previously, is thumbnail 3. The scale of this thumbnail makes the contemplation of the object more epic, and we can see a wider view of the strange planet. Before continuing, I scale the thumbnail way more than its original size to approach the final resolution. This is because I will now work in more detail and need more pixels so I can be more precise.

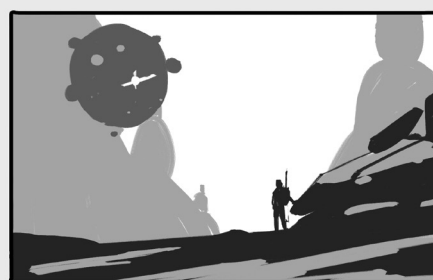
The thumbnail ceases to be a thumbnail! I scale the image but the elements are not yet well defined, especially the ship. I now come to improving it; working a little more on the background, and the object that is floating. I keep this whole process in values, and it is simply one more step with a larger canvas, to give more detail and definition to what we had previously. ►

05 Continue to work on the thumbnails defining volumes and ambient light

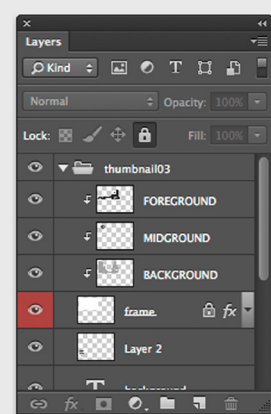
06 The image now has more resolution and more detail can be painted, however only on the elements of interest

PRO TIP Use three values

With only three values you can make up the image of a rather simple form, without getting crazy with lights and shadows, that can be added in a later process of the concept. To each value I assign one for mid ground, one for background and one for foreground. The foreground is what will be closer in our scene, and therefore it is the most contrasted. The background is the most distant, which tends to be little contrasted by the particles that exist in the atmosphere.



Values



● The three values are on their own labeled layers to keep the composition organized

07 **Guide the gaze:** Part of the work of creating an image is to know how to guide the eye of the viewer to points where you really want to. There are many ways of achieving this, making the view travel just the way desired through the canvas. These points are called focal points, since they are the first place where the eye is going to pause on the image. In the composition that I have made there are focal points given by the intersections of the composition by rule of thirds. However, we can also reinforce these points if we emphasize the contrast. If I try to remove the contrast of the entire image, taking it to a dark value, and add a point with a very light value, then that point immediately attracts the attention of the eye.

Another example of focal point is the detail. In the previous point I devoted myself to giving more detail to the image, but above all to the three main elements: the pilot, the ship and the strange object. Instead, I didn't even touch the background. This is important because it also saves work, since the focal points are chosen by us, we have to focus more on those parts, and those which are not going to have much attention may be left with less detail. I reinforce the focal points by adding a reflection to the ship, and a projected light coming from the strange object, and along the way, add some lights to the pilot costume (and this is possible because it is sci-fi!)



07

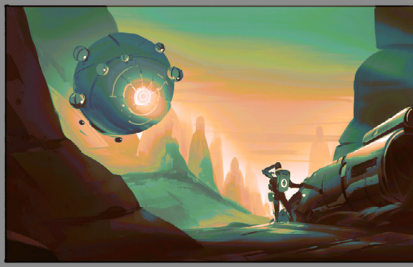
08 **Lights and shadows:** It is time to close the image in values before starting with color. It is almost ready, but I can still add some more details, such as lights and shadows. I add more volume to the mountains that are close to the camera as being closer makes them more visible, and also make them bigger and darker.

I exaggerate the light cast by the strange object and project the shadows of the pilot over the terrain and ship, reinforcing the space.

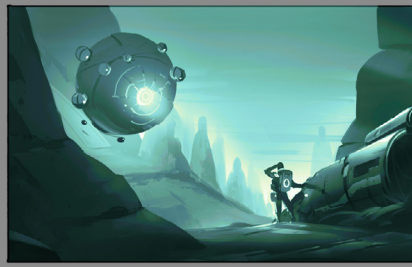
In the background I add more strange formations and repeat them, creating a pattern that gives more coherence to the environment. With a light



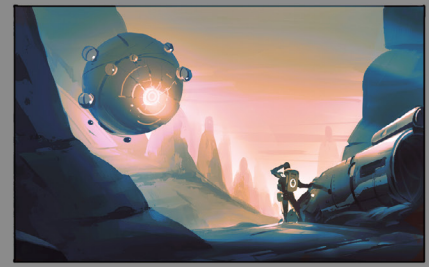
08



Cold and warm



Cold colors



Complementary


Color palette examples

09

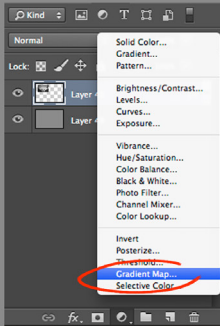
TOOL GUIDE

Using gradient maps to color

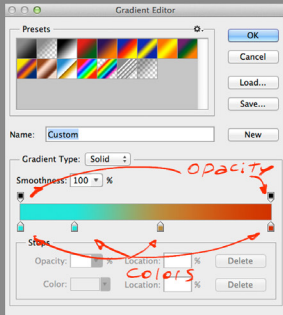
There are many tools that let us provide base colors to a black and white image so you can try different palettes quickly. One of my favorites is the option of a Gradient Map adjustment layer. It is very simple to use, just click on the icon to add a new adjustment layer, which is located at the bottom of the Layers window. You can now access the Gradient Editor, where you can quickly select colors and see how they apply to an image. As it is an adjustment layer it does not alter the original layer, so you can continue handling it.




#1 Black & white sketch



#2 Click on the create adjustment layer



#3 In the gradient editor, we choose the colors



#4 Our B&W sketch is quickly colored

Gradient Map

rebound that comes from the ground, I generate more volume to the central body of the ship, making it stand out by contrast from the land. With these last retouches I can begin to see how I am going to work the color palette.

09 Creating color palettes: I am going to return to the thumbnails but this time to focus on the color. The advantage of working on a sci-fi idea is that you can play a lot with colors. In this case, the strange planet gives me even more freedom to experience the color palette. There

are many types of palette you can use: pallets composed of complementary colors, warm and cool, just primary colors, and monochromatic colors, and so on.

What I do is make three copies of the image in values, and to each one, assign a different palette to view options. These palettes are general and will not have detail, so I keep them in a thumbnail size. In this case I find it interesting to try out three options: a palette of complementary colors, another of warm and cool colors, and a third ►

07 These examples show how the viewer's eye can be guided by altering the composition's focal point

08 Working first with only values is not the only way to deal with a concept, but it serves to keep the composition under control

09 Monochromatic palettes, in this case the cold color, are usually quite boring and generally used very little



palette of only cool ones. One of the things that I like to do is use many colors in a subtle way, to enrich the image, and avoid the possible use of black and white to shade or light; so instead I do this with different tones. Of the three palettes, the one I choose is that of complementary colors.

10 **Finishing the concept:** It is time to put the finishing touches to the image and to bring this first idea to a close. In general, and because I was very careful with the whole process, I have come to this point with almost all of the composition figured out.

The only thing missing is to add a few details, such as some more tones and effects like floating particles, smoke, lights and boards. The first thing I do to finish off the composition is give more detail to the main objects that make up the concept. I then continue with the mountains,



The Artist



Juan Novelletto
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adding more colors and some details like cracks and small stones to the floor of the scene. I also add more sky and cloud tones, but not too much so as not to disturb the balance of the composition. I don't want to remove attention from what is important after all.

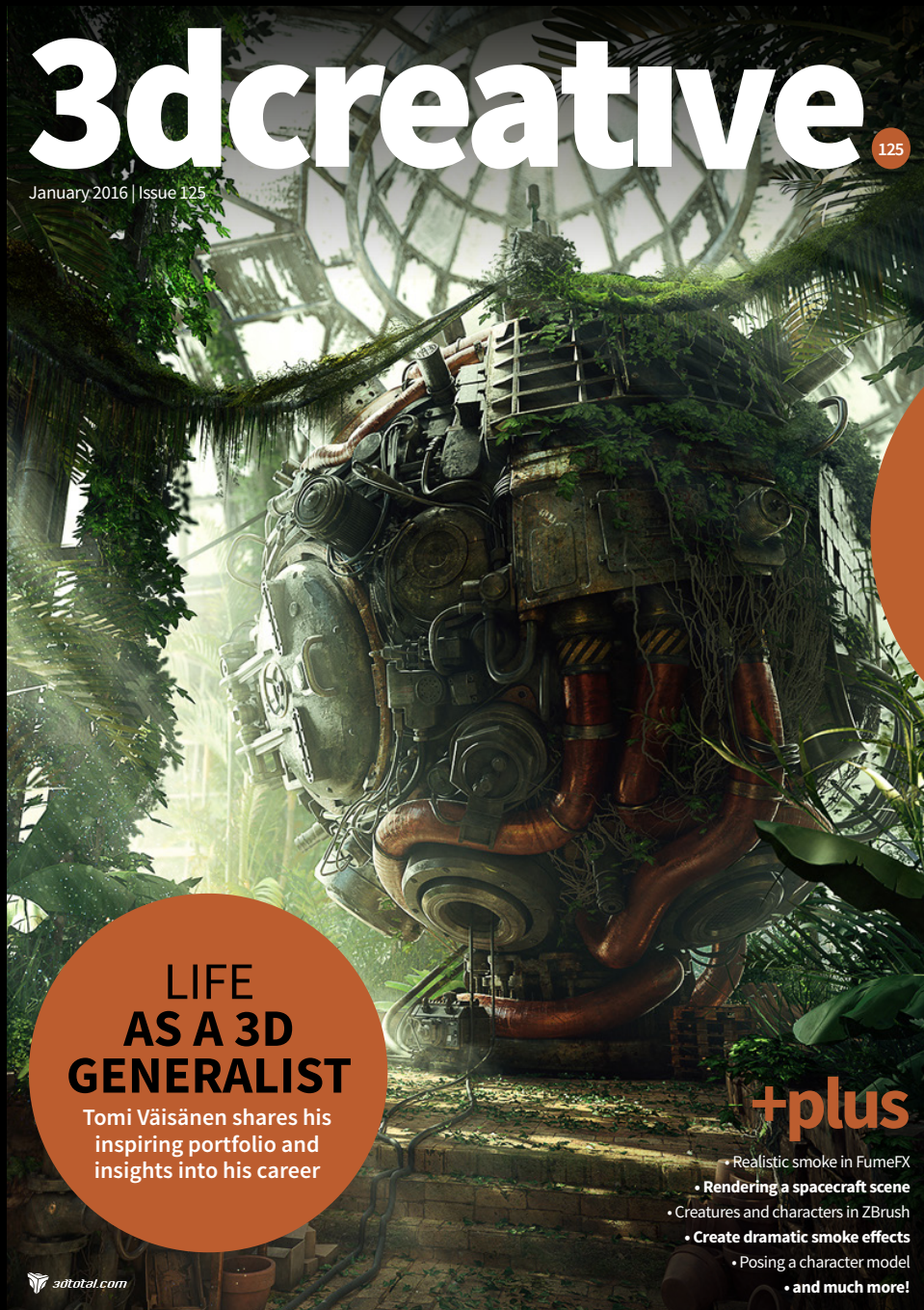
So here I am with a sci-fi concept where the focus is mainly on the balanced composition. The final touches help to lead the viewer's eye around the image. This is the first image of a series of tutorials, and I'll keep iterating so that the end result is really good. ●

10 Maintaining the original idea and working with attention to the composition throughout has led to a stronger image

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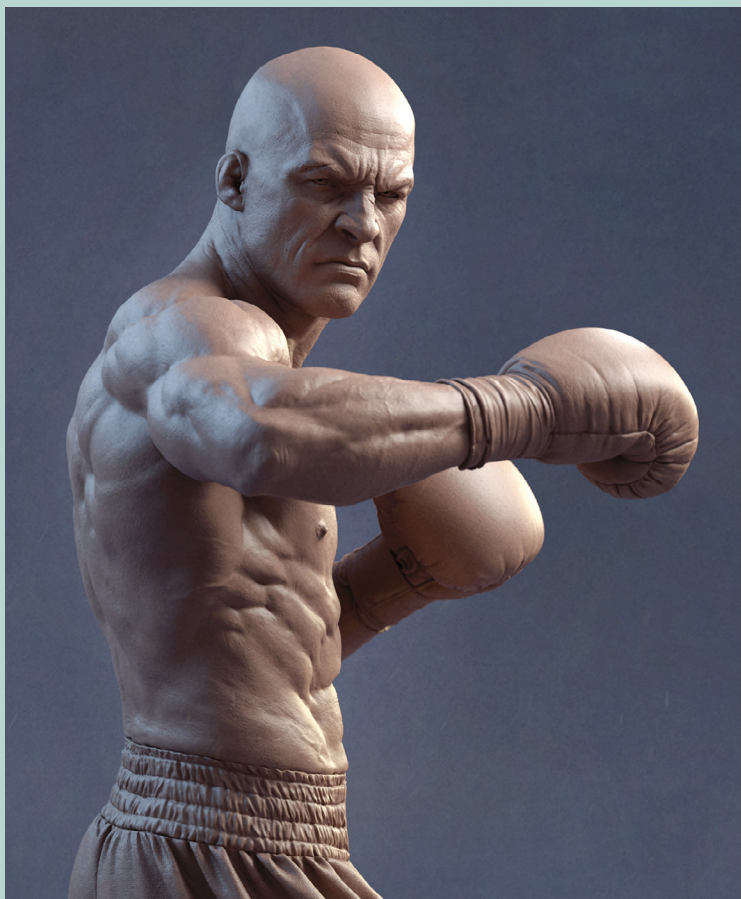
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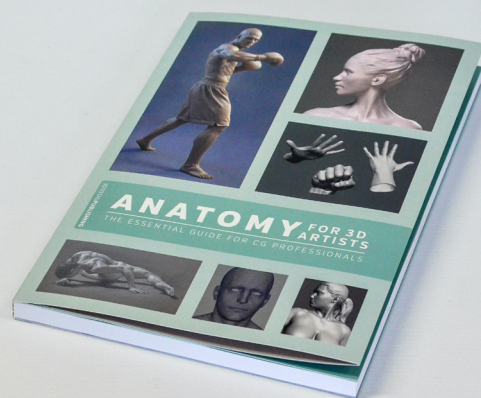
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Victor Mosquera
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Software Used:
Photoshop

Victor Mosquera is a Colombian concept artist living in Toronto, Canada. His clients include companies such as Ubisoft, Universal Music group, Volta, Tor.com and One Pixel Brush.

Photoshop fundamentals

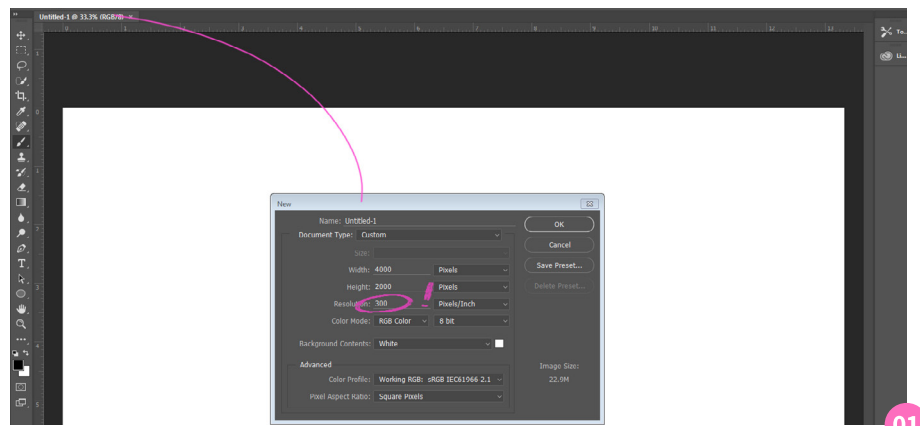
Refresh your knowledge with this beginner's guide to the Photoshop interface from Ubisoft's Victor Mosquera ▶

Pick up tips, try new tools and gain confidence...

Photoshop is one of the main tools used today by industry professionals. It's one of the most powerful tools that I know. I'm going to explain some basic concepts and fundamentals about this software, as well as some ways I personally use it, to make the most out of it. But I want to say that at the end the most important thing is that you experience it for yourself.

I've been using Photoshop for more than 10 years, so I have enough experience with it to make it work exactly how I want it to. I have experimented with it, watched and read a million tutorials over the years, and got some tips from my artist friends. Even recently I learned some new settings and even realized finally what a button that I've seen all my life does. So I really encourage you to just experiment. Click every single button and just see what that specific thing does. Over time, these little pieces of knowledge will start to connect with you, giving a stronger understanding of the software (this also applies to painting too).

01 **Setting up your canvas:** Before explaining the interface and the tools, I want you to set up a canvas so you can experiment with the tools on it later. Go to File > New. The new document window will appear. On the Document Type present tab Photoshop gives you some templates with fixed dimensions



01

based on popular formats that have been used by different disciplines.

What you want to do is create your own canvas based on your own needs. Just introduce a size that you think is going to benefit your image the most. There is no right or wrong when it comes to this. You can also change the units of measure for inches or centimeters as well as some other options. This is usually helpful when a client asks you to do a painting of a specific size, because it has to fit a publication that has an already defined layout.

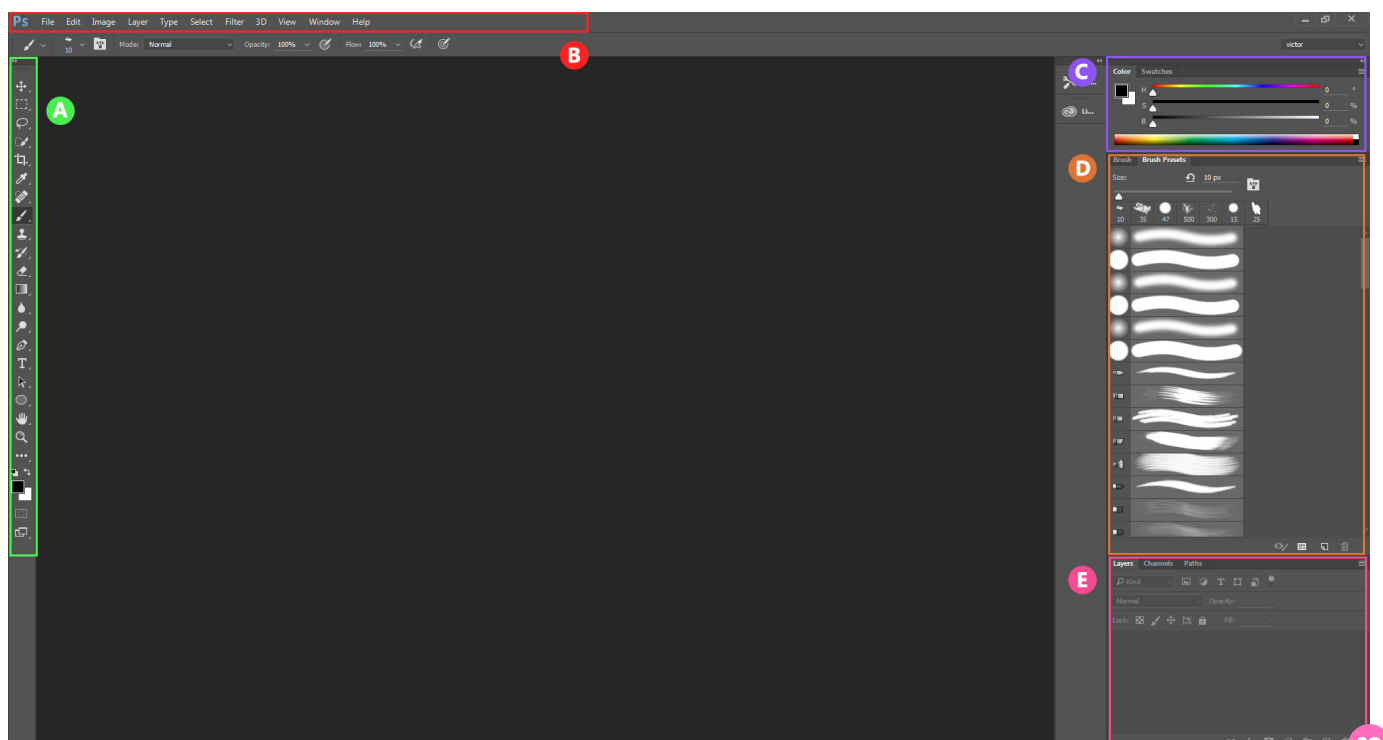
The tricky side of setting up a new canvas is setting up a resolution. Before you set up a resolution, ask yourself if your image is going to be viewed online or printed. If your image is going to be shown on a screen 72 pixels/inch is usually good. If you want to print it your image needs to have enough resolution to get a good result on the paper. 300 pixels/inch is very common

for print and it's a good place to start. This topic is much deeper than this so I encourage you to experiment with resolution as well. Print your own images and see what happens when you play with different resolutions.

02 **The tools panel:** I'm going to break the interface down in a way that's more related to you as a painter. I have outlined the main sections of the interface in colored squares (Fig. 02). I recommend that you look at Photoshop as a toolbox where you keep your paints and brushes, especially if you come from a traditional painting background. ▶

01 Create your own canvas by introducing a size that you think is going to benefit your image

02 Your mark making tools: brushes, selection tools, erasers and smudging tools are on the tools panel



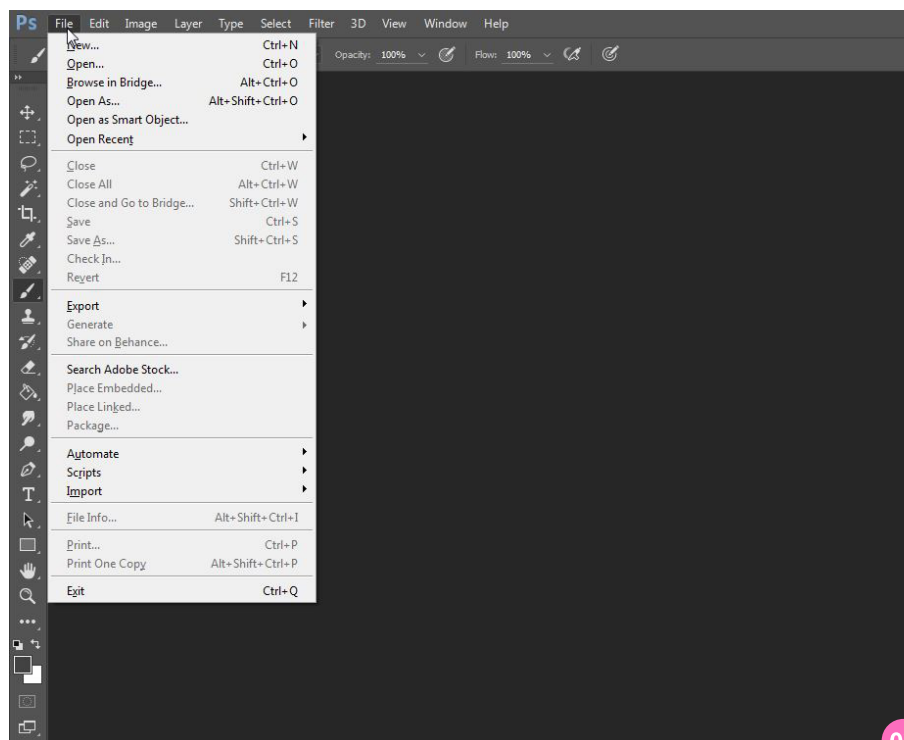
02

I'm going to start with section A, the tools panel. This is where all your brushes, selection tools, erasers and smudging tools are; everything that you might use to make a mark on a canvas is here. I'm not going to explain every single one of them because there are so many of them and realistically you only need a handful of them. Through this tutorial I'm going to explain the ones that I use the most and the ones that I think are key to getting ideas from your head straight into Photoshop. Once again, I encourage you to just try them all and see what they do.

03 The menu bar: Next we have section B, the menu bar (Fig. 03). This is where you can access basic functions such as creating new files and layers, modifying selections and managing your windows. The main things that I use are File for creating new documents, Open Recent, and Save. I also use Image > Image Size which is very useful to resize images. This section is pretty easy since it is the same format used by the most basic software packages out there.

There are some tabs that I never use because they contain functions that I need often, so instead of bothering to open the tab every single time I just use the keyboard shortcuts. This is really useful if you want to become good at Photoshop, as using shortcuts will make your workflow 100% more efficient and faster. Photoshop gives you some pre-determined shortcuts for basic functions like saving (Ctrl+S, or Cmd+S if you are using a Mac) or free transform (Ctrl+T).

I recommend that you open every single tab in the menu bar and check all the shortcuts. Also,



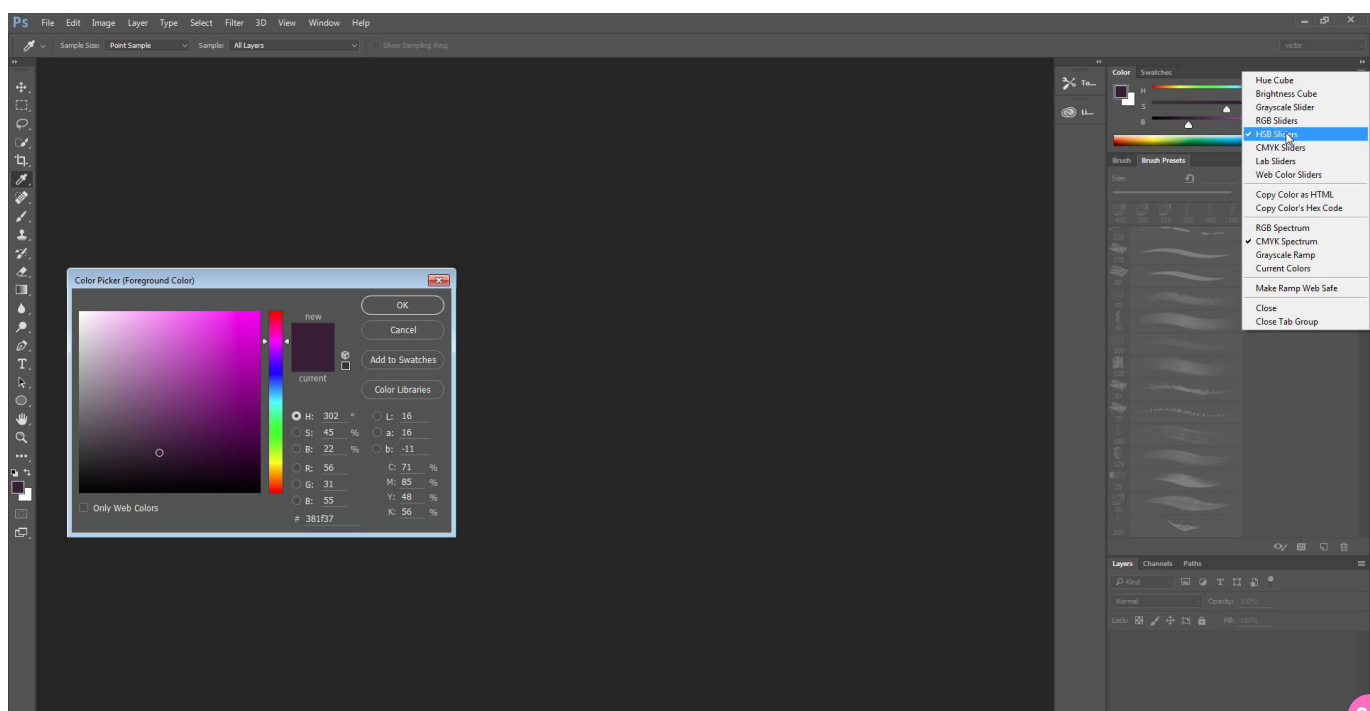
03

after using Photoshop for a while you might want to assign your own shortcuts to functions that you use all the time. You can do this simply by going to Edit > Keyboard shortcuts, then you can type any combination of keys and assign it to a specific action.

04 The color panel: The color panel is key in the process of creating a painting and it's simple too. You can see the color panel at all times in the upper-right corner. You can change the settings to different options (RGB, CMYK) if you want using the tab in the right corner of the

panel. I always keep it at HSB (Hue/Saturation/Brightness) because it makes more sense when approaching this from a painting perspective, since it's actually using terms that you will use as a painter.

You can also access a different kind of color panel if you go back to the tools panel and click on the colored squares at the bottom of it. I also use this one a lot since it works more like a traditional painting palette. It works the same way as the HSB sliders but the layout is different. On the big square you can go up or down to



04

affect the brightness or left and right to affect the saturation. Then you have the smaller rectangle to the left of it which affects the hue if you go up or down on it.

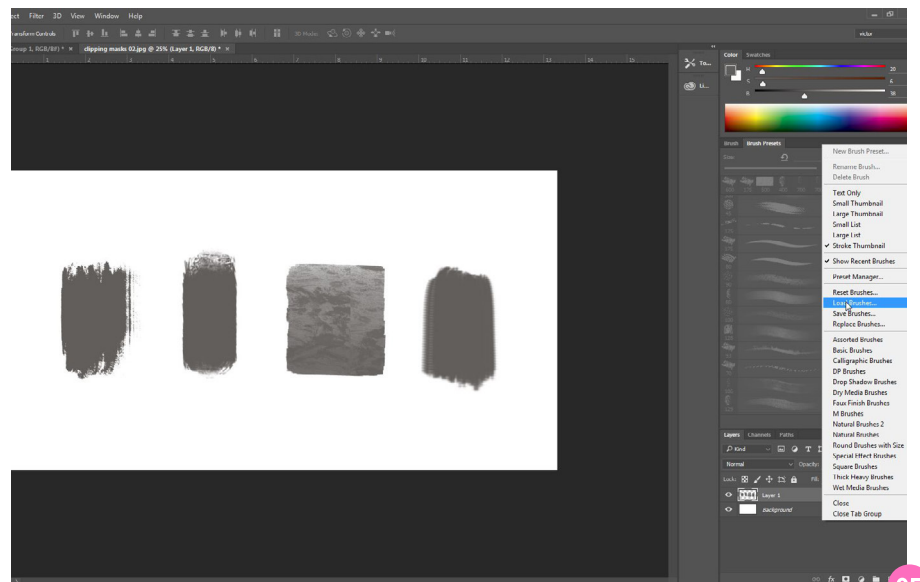
05 Brush presets: When you open Photoshop for the first time, it might look different to the one that I'm showing you guys here. That's because I re-arranged my workspace a bit to make my workflow better. Under the color panel I added the Brush Presets panel (Fig. 05). You can add different windows and arrange them in any way you want. You can do this by going to Window and then check the tab or window that you need, then just drag and drop it anywhere in your workspace. I'm using the Brush Preset window because it's the easiest way for me to pick up different brushes.

After this you can go to the tools panel and select your brush or eraser, selecting different brushes to get different effects and textures. Many Photoshop brushes have been created to emulate traditional painting, so you can have brushes that emulate chalks, acrylics, oils and all kinds of materials. I usually download a lot of brushes from the internet or collect them from friends. You can load brushes into Photoshop by going to the small tab at the upper-right corner of the Brush Presets window and click Load Brushes. Over the years you will download, trade and hoard a bunch of brushes, so there is no correct brush to use. Just try them all and over time you will select and keep the ones that you use the most.

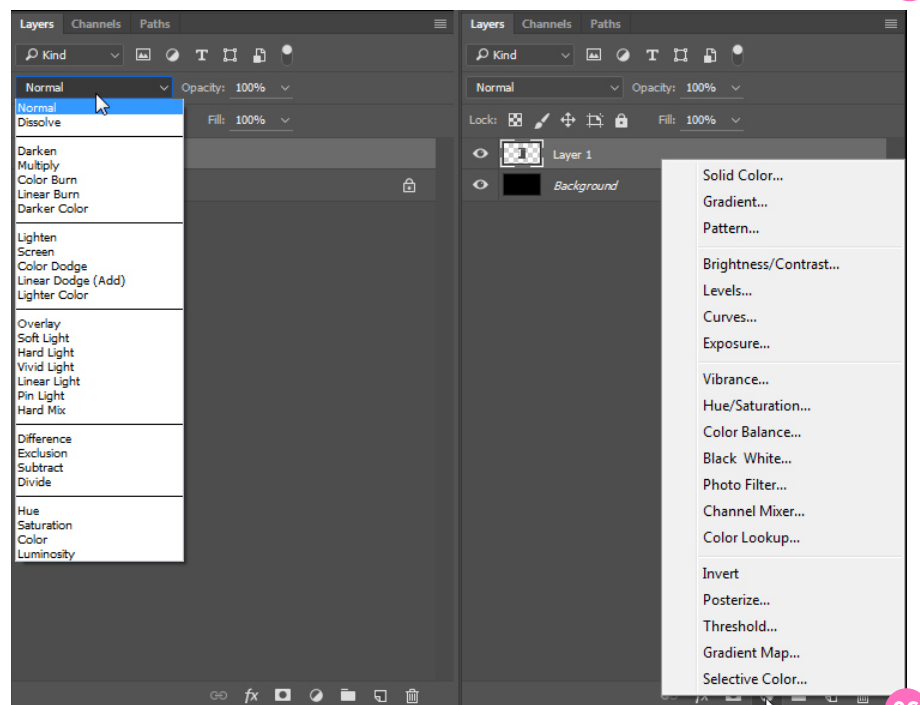
06 The Layers panel: Understanding the Layers panel (Fig. 06) is essential for having a good workflow. The concept of layers is not difficult but the way you use them is key.

When you add a new layer it's like adding a new transparent canvas on top of your image. You can add as many layers as you want, and change their properties to get different effects. This is one of the main reasons why Photoshop is so powerful. You can experiment by adding layers to try new tools and settings without damaging your original painting. Changing the layer's blend mode can achieve different results too. You can view all the blend modes by click on the tab that says Normal, which is the default mode for a new layer on Photoshop. There are quite a few options in there, so I'm not going to explain them all, but I will say that I use the blend modes a fair amount. I will give an example of how you can use them to add something to your painting later on.

You will learn the layer blend modes better if you open a painting or photo of your own in Photoshop. Add a new layer on top with another ▶



05



06

PRO TIP

Use shortcuts!

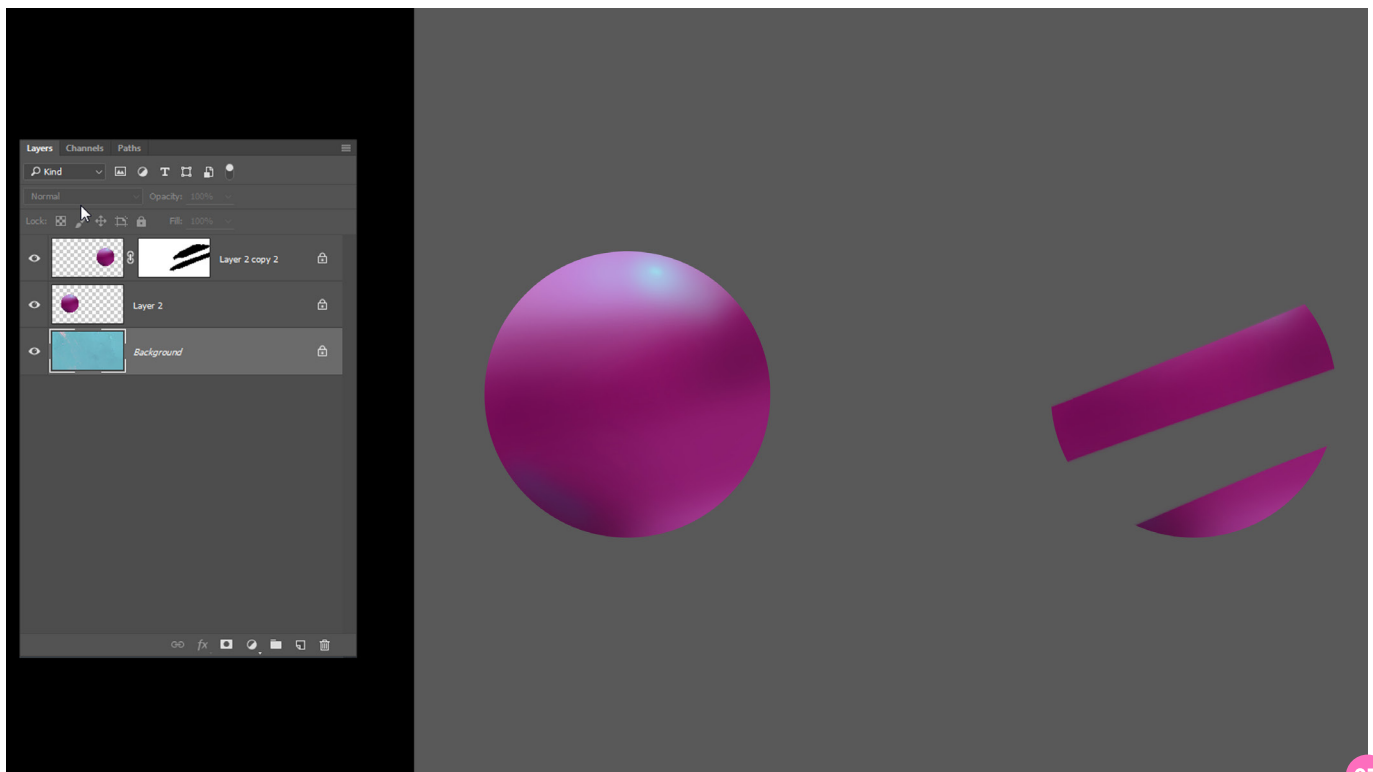
Shortcuts are the best way to maximize your workflow. Photoshop allows you to customize and create your own shortcuts. Take a moment and think about what functions in Photoshop you use the most, and then figure out what combinations of keys are easy to hit once you're working. You can create your own shortcuts by going to the Menu bar > Edit > Keyboard Shortcuts.

03 The File drop-down list on the menu bar is where you can find essential options like Save

05 Use the Brush Presets window to load a variety of brushes that you can experiment with

04 The color panel allows you to work with different color settings and adjust the Hue, Saturation and Brightness

06 Adding a new layer is like adding a new transparent canvas on top of your image



07

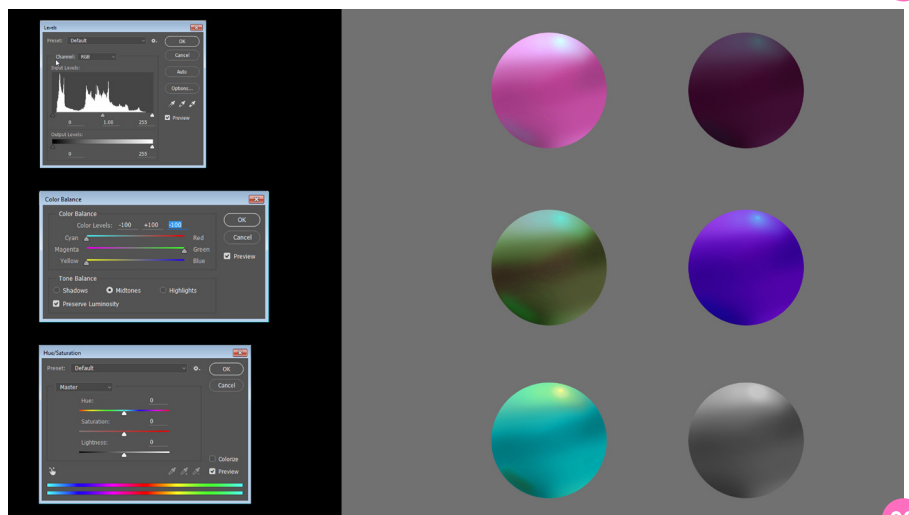
image and then start scrolling down the blending modes and see how they affect the image. The names are often self explanatory, so that helps a lot too.

One last thing that I use all the time is the small icons at the bottom of the Layers panel. If you hover the cursor over the top of an icon it will tell you what it does. You can utilize the icons to quickly create a new layer or even delete it. The options that I use 90% of the time are the Add Layer Mask and the Create Adjustment Layer.

07 Layer masks: This is something that you are more likely familiar with if you have worked with traditional media before as it works exactly as masking tape. A Layer Mask is something you apply to a layer to control the transparency of it on certain areas. Imagine you have a layer that you want to hide; you could just delete it, but if you want to hide only half of it, you can apply a mask.

The way it works is, once you add it (using the small icon at the bottom of the Layers panel), it creates a white square to the left of the layer. That means that the layer is still visible. If you want to hide a specific section of it, you have to paint in that square with any brush using black paint.

Once you are painting on a layer mask you will see that the color panel will only allow you to use black and white values. Painting with white allows the layer to be visible while painting with black hides the layer.



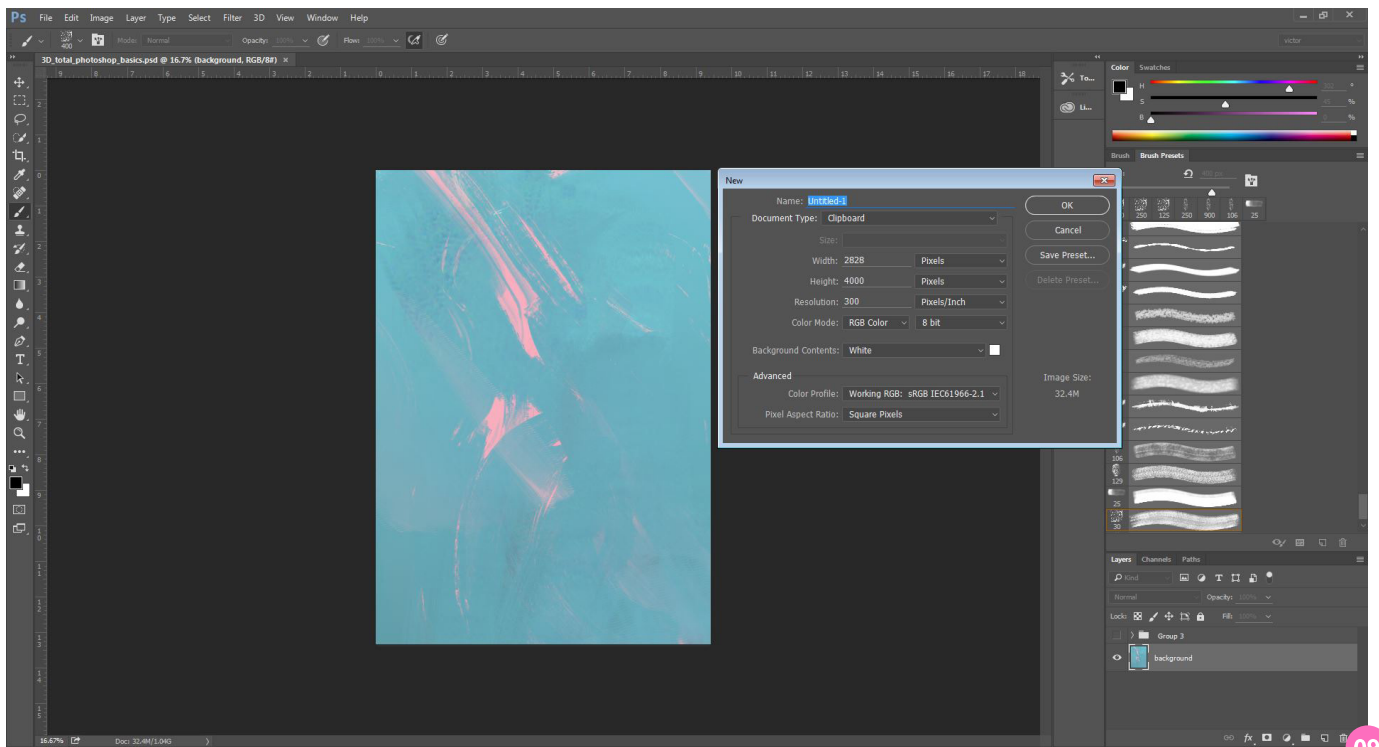
08

08 Adjustments: Adjustments are the most important tools you have to edit images. Once you have a painting going, but you need to edit certain aspects of it, you go to: Image > Adjustments, on the Menu bar or you can access it creating an Adjustment layer via the Layer tab as mentioned before. There are a lot of adjustments again, so please go ahead and try them all. The ones that I use all the time are Levels, which correct the value, Color Balance which is very useful to make quick color corrections, and Hue/Saturation which allows you to correct any area of your image using the HSB sliders, just as in the color panel.

All the names are very self explanatory again so it's just a matter of trying them all. There are no right or wrong adjustments to use. Look at your

painting and just see what it needs. Adjustments are often really good for solving problems, but you first need to realize what the problem is, then find the tool that will help you solve it in that specific situation.

09 Painting: Now that I have given you a quick walk-through of some of the tools that are most common when you're painting in Photoshop, I will show how these tools can be put into practice. The software itself is massive so there is no way that I can explain every single button and tab. That is why I insist that the way to go is taking the time to experiment with everything. However, I feel that with the tools that I mentioned before you should be able to understand what's happening when you see someone painting in Photoshop. I'm going to



09



10

start creating an image from scratch, using all the tools mentioned before and some new ones that I will explain as I go.

I start with a new canvas which is 2828 x 4000 pixels. I chose these settings because the image I'm painting is made specifically for a book, so it already has defined dimensions. Also the resolution is 300 pixels/inch, because I know it's going to be printed so I need a good amount of information in my pixels. Next I select a basic texture brush on my Brush Presets tab and cover the white of the canvas with some basic tones.

10 Brushstrokes: In this step I use a hard edged brush, and start sketching

some interesting looking silhouettes. I use a combination of brush and eraser when doing this. I make a mark on the canvas with a Hard brush and then use a Hard eraser to refine the shape. I do this for all my main shapes. Since I use the brush tool and the eraser tool so much, instead of going to the tool menu I use the keyboard shortcuts. I press B for the brush tool and E for the eraser tool.

For this project I'm going to sketch a character. I start with some basic flat tones to create a poster-like version of my final painting. This will be the backbone of my image and I will stick to it through the entire painting. It's very important that you are organized with your layers. In this ▶

07 A Layer Mask is something you apply to a layer to control the transparency of it on certain areas

08 Adjustments are the most important tools you have to edit images which can fix a specific aspect of your painting

09 Using a basic texture brush from the Brush Presets tab, cover the white of the canvas with some basic tones

10 The best way to get interesting shapes is by making bold brushstrokes and then refining them with the eraser after

case I have my main elements in separate labeled layers. You can name your layers by double-clicking on top of each layers' name.

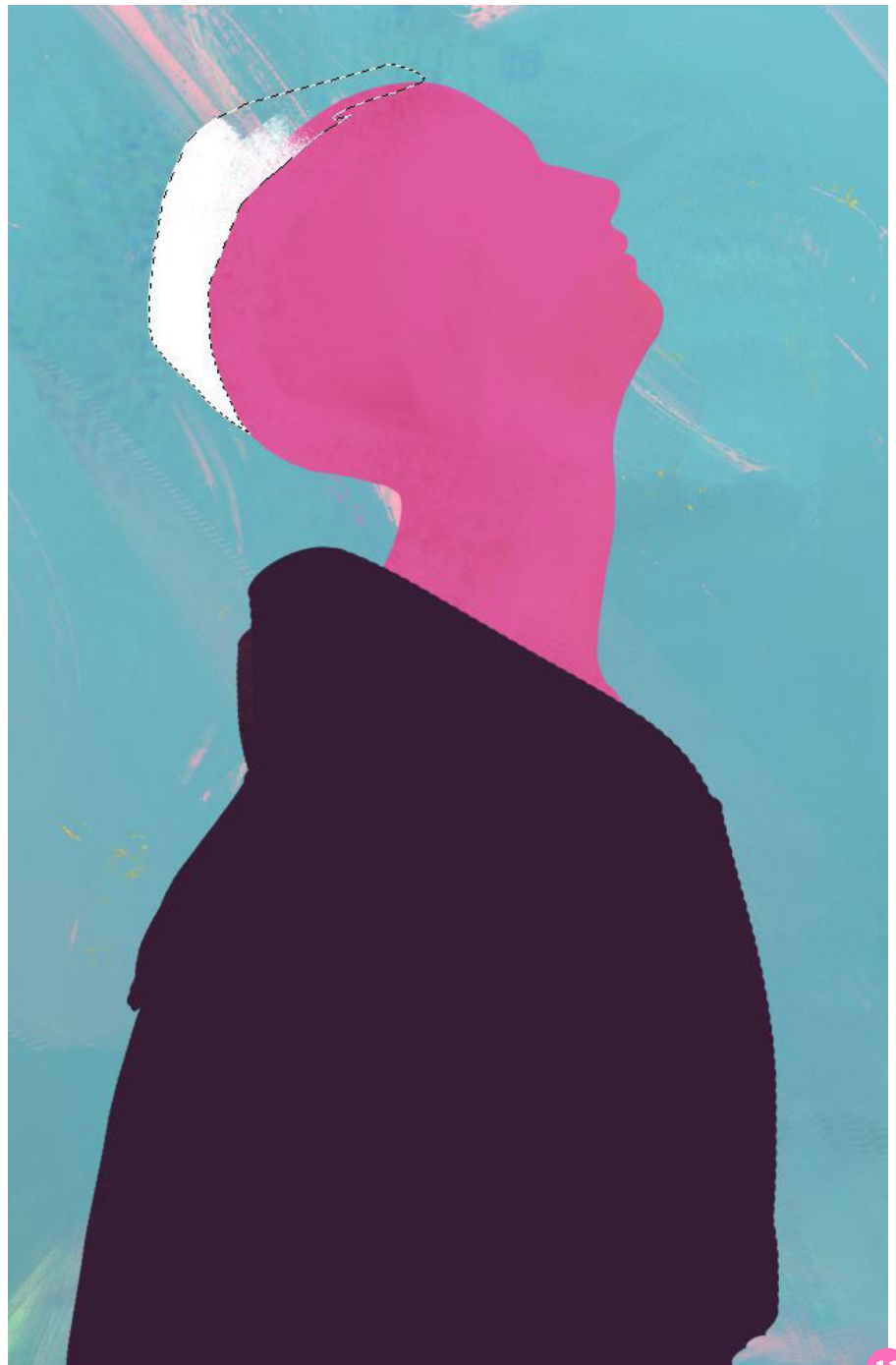
11 Selections: One of the most common ways to get fast and clean shapes into your painting is by using the Selection tools. They are located at the top of the tools panel. There are different kinds of selection tools, the most common ones are the Rectangular and Elliptical Marquee tools, and the Lasso and Polygonal Lasso tool. As the name suggests you can create rectangular selections and circular selections with the first two. One trick that I use all the time is holding the Shift key while creating a selection with the Marquee tool to create perfectly symmetrical squares and circles.

The Lasso tool allows you to create free selections just by free hand drawing. It works particularly well for organic shapes. For instance, I'm using it here to block the main shape of my character's hair. Once you have a selection you can fill it with color, or paint inside with a brush, like I'm doing in this step.

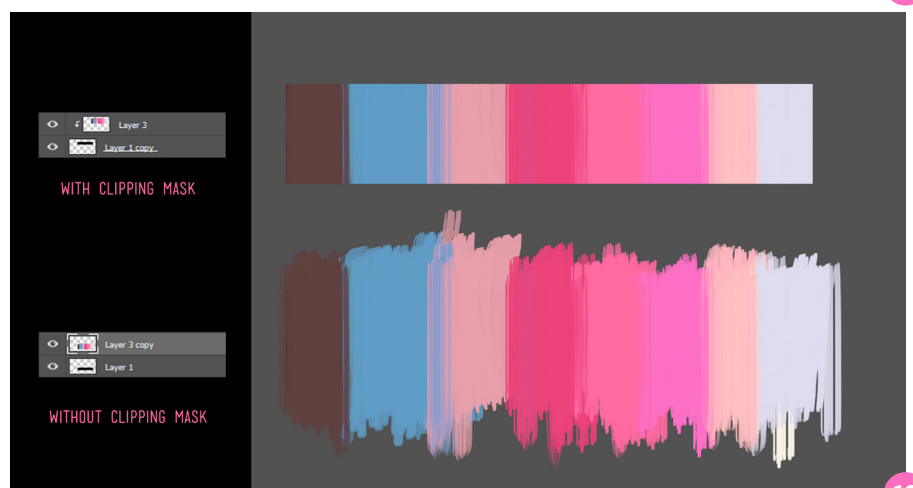
12 Clipping Masks: After defining my main shapes, I use Clipping Masks to add information into my already defined silhouettes. If you hold Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac) and position the cursor over the line dividing two layers in the layer panel, the cursor will change to a blank square and an arrow pointing down. That means you will be clipping one layer to the one that is below it, which creates boundaries for that layer. In this case my boundaries are the shapes that I created on the previous step. I can now paint freely and use bold and dynamic brushstrokes without worrying about messing up my initial shapes.

Using this technique I start to add my initial values and colors to the skin and the clothes of my character. You can parent as many layers as you want to one specific layer. This allows you to experiment easily with different brushes and colors since you can always go back to your initial images by deleting and adding new clipping mask layers.

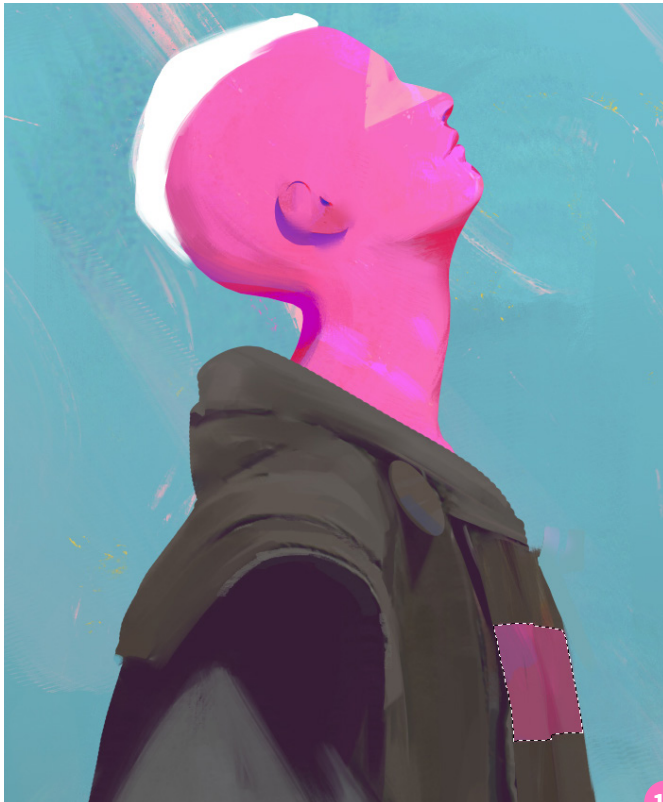
13 Painting techniques: Now I have a solid base and have established what my image is going to be, I can focus on painting. I suggest you work this way every time and don't get caught up painting details in the initial stage. You will have an easier time and your image will be more successful if you go from big, broad shapes and strokes to small and more precise details towards the end. Something that I do all the time to make sure that I'm not getting caught



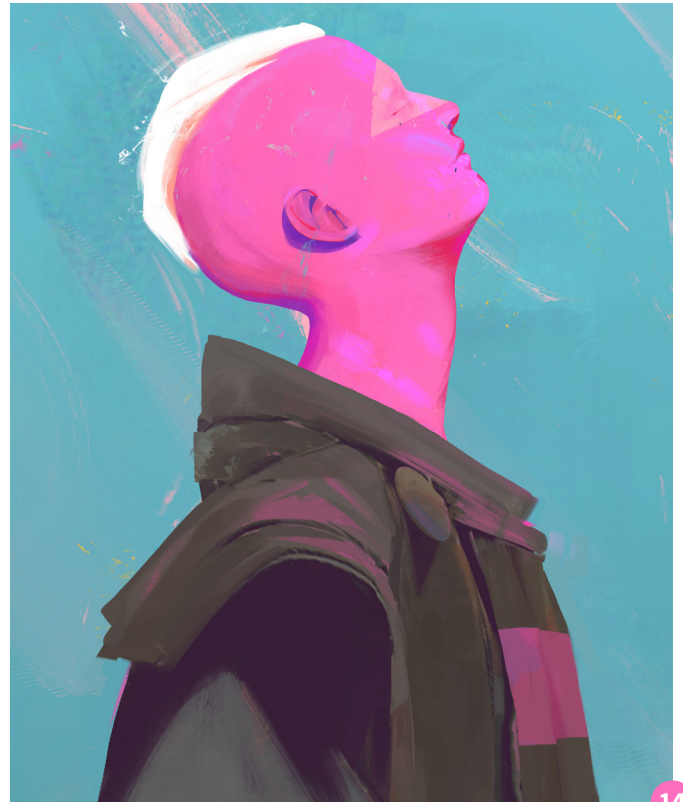
11



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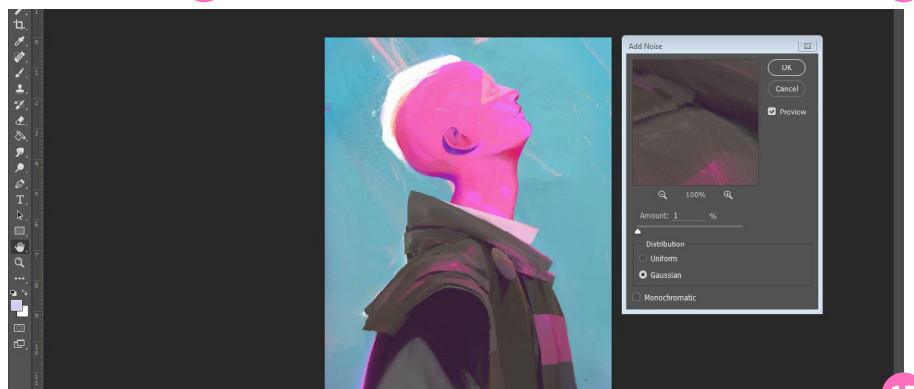
14

in the details, is to work with my canvas zoomed out. You can zoom out or zoom in if you go to the Menu bar and click Zoom in or Zoom out. Since I use this feature so much I have a keyboard shortcut which is Ctrl+(+/-).

At this stage I start to suggest some of the anatomy and the design of the clothes. I do this using all the techniques I explained before. For example, all the shadows on the skin are done by using clipping masks. I create the pink stripe on the jacket by creating a basic selection with my Lasso tool and painting inside of the selection with some texture brushes.

14 Details: As I mentioned before, I take care of the details towards the end of the painting process. It's only at this stage that I zoom in quite a bit and start sculpting the form. I'm using a texture brush here to suggest the expression of the character as well as details like accessories, subtle hue changes on the skin and some details on the hair. I also add some pink reflections on the clothes here to add more interest to that area, and also introduce some of the skin tones into the rest of the painting to make it more harmonious.

15 Final adjustments: At the end of each painting I always take a bit of time to play with the adjustments and layer modes. First I add a new layer on top of everything and set it to Color Dodge. This mode is particularly good to make quick, good-looking highlights and



15

effects. I use it to add more interest to the painting but you have to be careful with this one. Be subtle with the color choices as too much saturation and brightness runs the risk of over exposing your image.

Experiment with it to get a feel for what works or try this: grab a Soft brush, pick up a dark color and start glazing softly over your image. If it's not doing anything, pick a brighter color until you have the ideal results. Then I go to the Menu bar > Image > Adjustments > Levels, and tweak the values a bit more to make the image pop out. Lastly I like to duplicate my painting. Flatten it (which you can do by going to the Menu bar > Layer > Flatten Image), then add some noise to simulate a film grain. You will find the noise option if you go to the Menu bar > Filter > Noise. You can play with the setting until you find something you like. I usually add 1% with Gaussian Blur selected.

I hope that you can get something from this tutorial; it's a lot of ground to cover in a few pages, but I feel that this is a good start if you want to get into digital painting. Only with time will you be comfortable enough with Photoshop. Use it every day, experiment with it and watch videos of people using it. At some point it will become second nature to you, I promise. ●

11 The lasso tool creates free selections

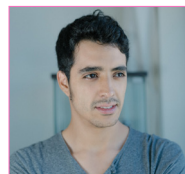
12 Clip layers together with a clipping mask

13 Add a pink stripe with the lasso tool, and texture brushes

14 A texture brush adds character and detail

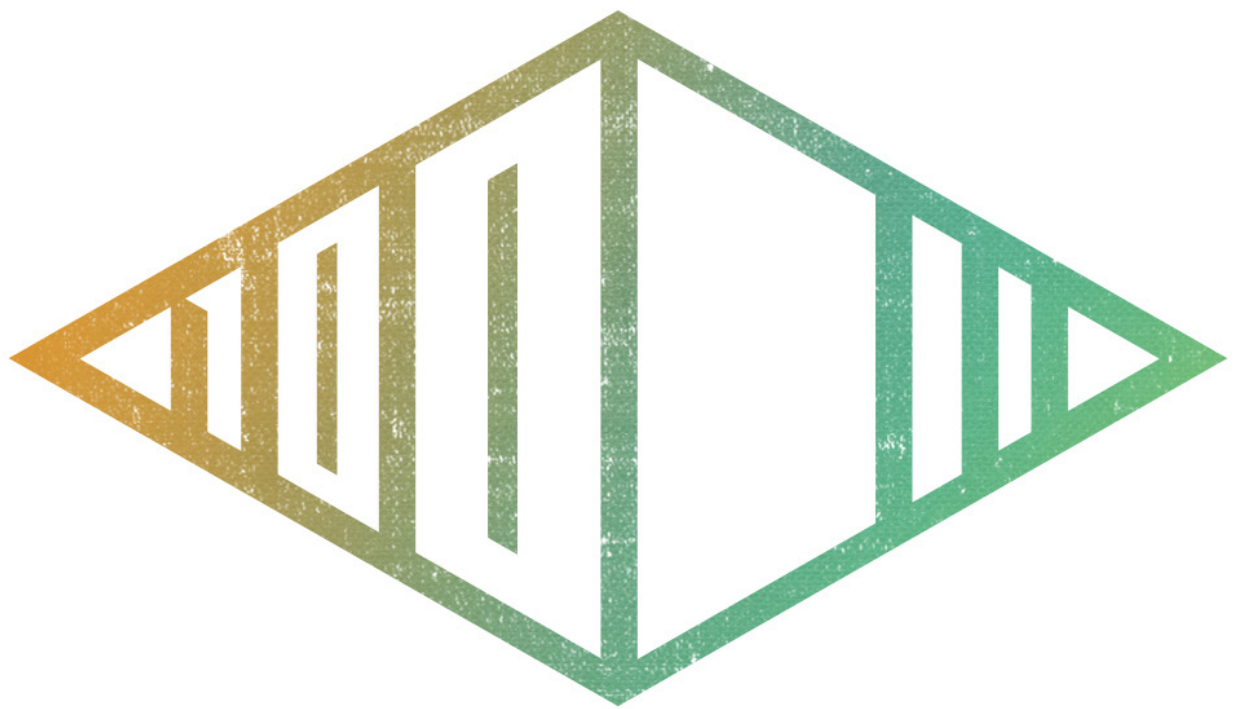
15 Adjustment layers and filters can make the image more interesting

The Artist



Victor Mosquera
victormosquera.com





#100Hours

The Artist



Przemek Duda

artstation.com/artist/przemek-duda

Software Used:

3ds Max, Photoshop

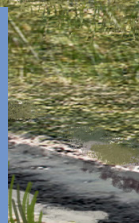
Concept and 3D artist Przemek Duda, based in Germany, started working for VFX companies after completing a degree in 2009. He creates characters and worlds for films and games.

S Y M B I O N T



Harmonious sci-fi design

Concept artist Przemek Duda explains how he created a scene detailing designs for a sci-fi world where nature and science combine for a brighter future ▶



WORLD



See how one scene can be used as a reference for creating a whole universe...

The image *Symbiont World* is really important to me. It is the first in an ongoing series of images that I am developing. With my concept I want to inspire and create hope. I wish for all of us, and especially for my daughter, a brighter future as there are already too many negative forecasts for our world. This vision, combined with my love for science fiction and nature, was the driving force from which the story and visual language from *Symbiont World* evolved. My story is set in the far future, and even though huge parts of the world are destroyed by man-made disasters, there is hope. Mankind has to use clean energy, natural and renewable resources, and form a respectful bond with nature. Using advanced technologies humans try to revitalize the world and make it inhabitable again for all life-forms.

In this tutorial I want to explain how to keep in mind the bigger picture while creating a compelling image. I want to show how nearly everything in an illustration can be meaningful and add to the narrative. To achieve this all available software, tools and techniques should be used. This involves the creation of mood boards, implementing photographs, composition and design sketches, 3D asset creation and rendering, and finally some good old fashioned painting.

01 **Visions of a better world:** Much of my inspiration comes from my travels and this time it came especially from a trip to the Eden Project in Cornwall, England. This tourist



01

attraction is a Bio-dome Complex, surrounded by a Kaolinite pit, which holds thousands of plants from different climatic zones. For me it represents the perfect symbiosis of nature and technology.

For every painting I create mood boards, usually between one and three. Selecting the right images is already the first step in designing the fictional world. I always keep them open in a Photoshop window while working on my paintings in case I want to pick a color or cut and paste elements directly. On longer projects though, they will help me tremendously to stay on course artistically.

02 **Catch the idea:** I try to get my vision on canvas before it evaporates (and every artist knows that happens a lot!) Fortunately I had my trusty Samsung Galaxy Note with me, so I

could paint directly in Sketchbook Pro. To speed up the process I started in black and white, so I didn't have to deal with the right color palette yet. Even at this early stage you can already see the main components of the image; a girl cruising on a vehicle through a rural environment with small silo-like houses and renewable energy sources in the background.

03 **A compilation of scribbles:** At this point I asked myself what kind of transportation would be used? What type of technology would be fitting?

I started with very simple sketches for the buggy, the floating whale ships and the wind turbines. I needed all my brainpower to focus on design and not on establishing complex perspectives. Side view sketches are relatively easy to paint



02

and perfect for this task. The most important rule while sketching side views is to pick the side of an object which describes the silhouette the best.

04 Building my world: By this point I am sure *Symbiont World* will stay with me for a long time, so I tried to create as many assets in 3D as I could. Once built I can reuse them in other paintings so in the long run this speeds up the development process tremendously.

I tried to incorporate similar design ideas into all assets. The blades are made from solar panels. The house has solar panels on the roof, and big parts of the building are located underground, using the natural isolation of the surrounding earth. The flying ships have solar panels on the wings and share the same propulsion and levitation methods with the buggy.

05 The ride has arrived: I decided that most of the vehicles use the same clean energy source and propulsion method, which does not harm the environment. The buggy is fueled by redirected compressed solar ▶

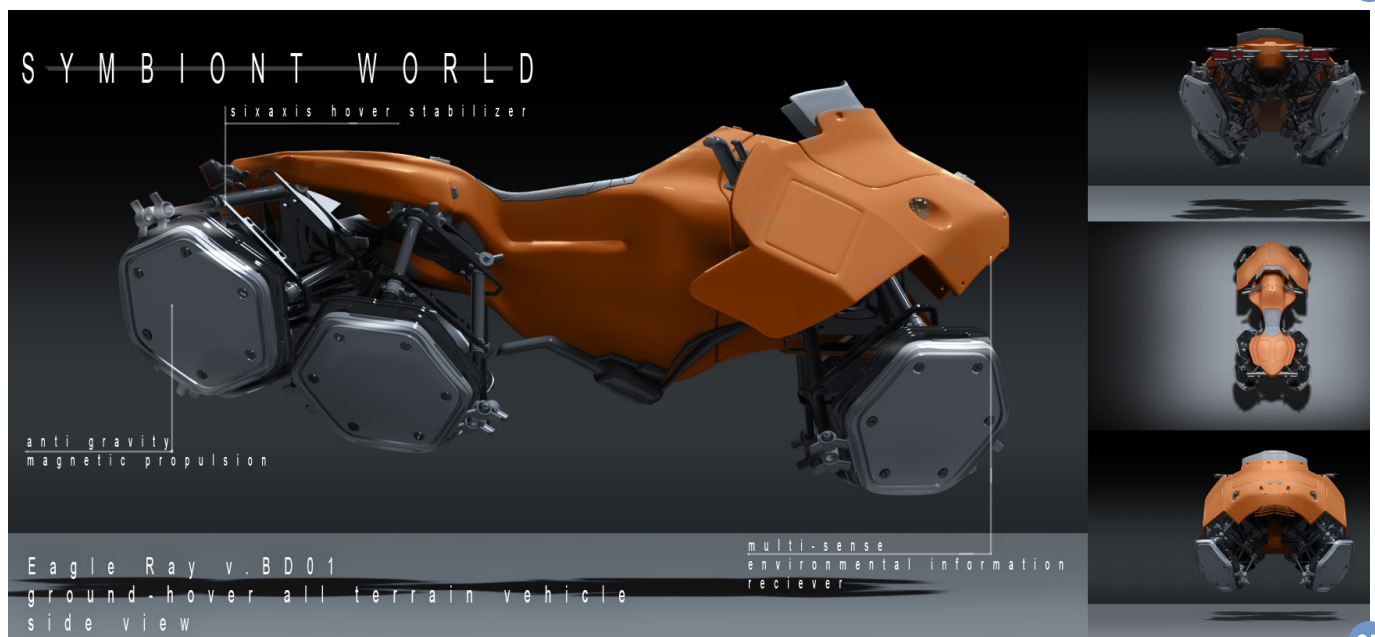
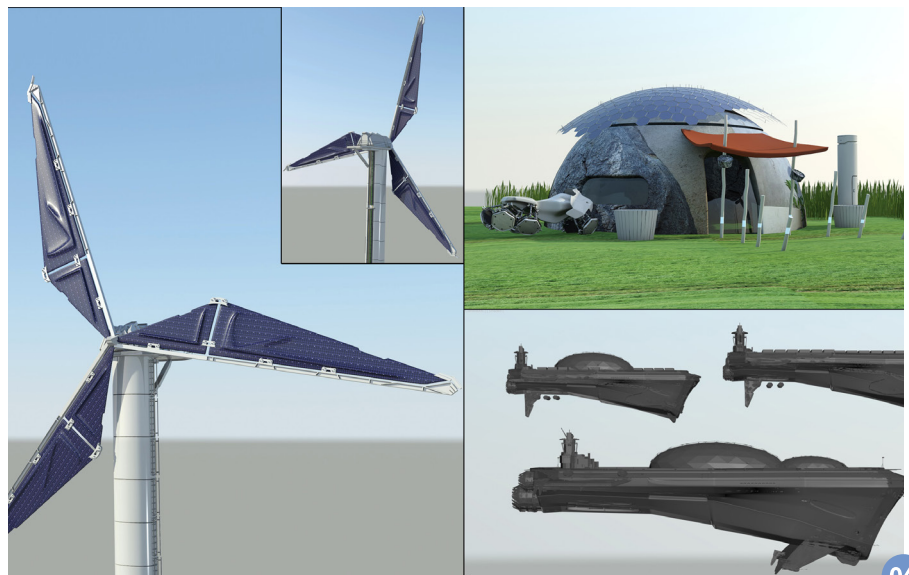
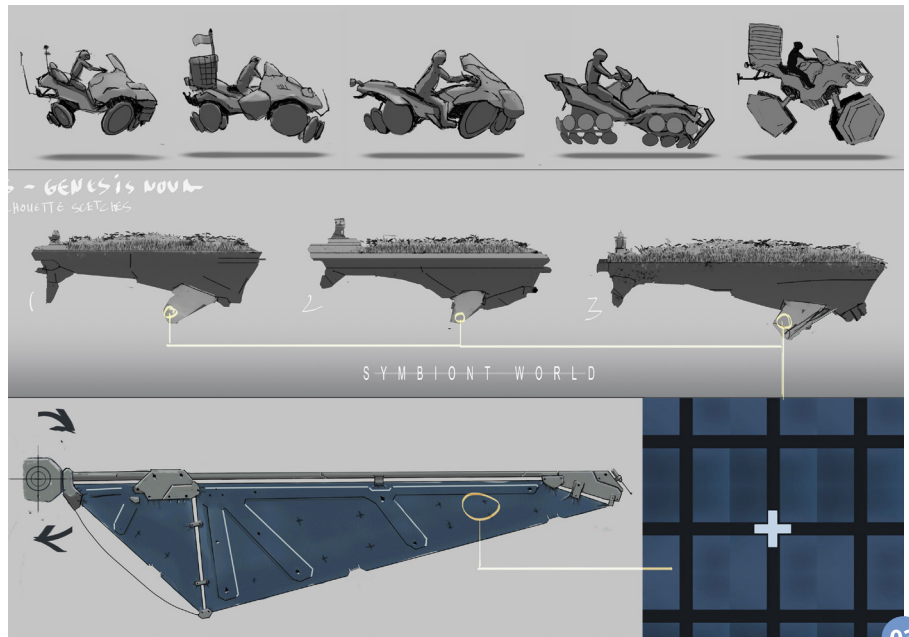
01 Start with research and preparation

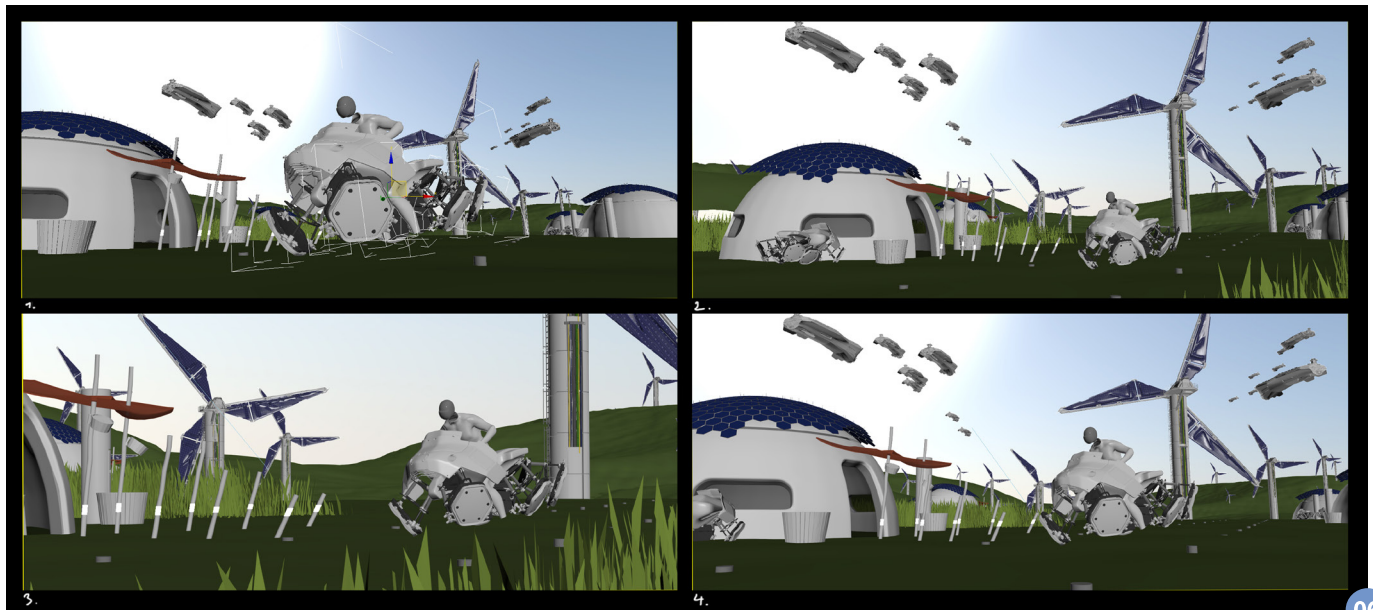
02 It is important to collect ideas for later

03 Designs for the buggy, flying ship and wind turbine

04 Each asset can be dragged and dropped into the final scene

05 A functional design sheet helps to create a believable world





06



07

“Wide lens cameras (28mm or less) create a sense of magnitude, while close ups (more than 85 mm) create a more intimate atmosphere”

energy and the power cells are stored below the driver seat. Also it has no wheels so it can not destroy the ground. Instead it uses anti gravity magnetic plates. They react to the ground plane and keep the buggy stable and afloat. All those requirements and ideas dictated how I designed the vehicle.

06 Compose the scene! After all the assets are modeled I threw them together into one scene. To speed up the process I didn't create UV mappings or complex materials. After all this was supposed to be fun right? Working in 3D gives me the possibility to fine tune the composition.

⚡ PRO TIP More than selfies

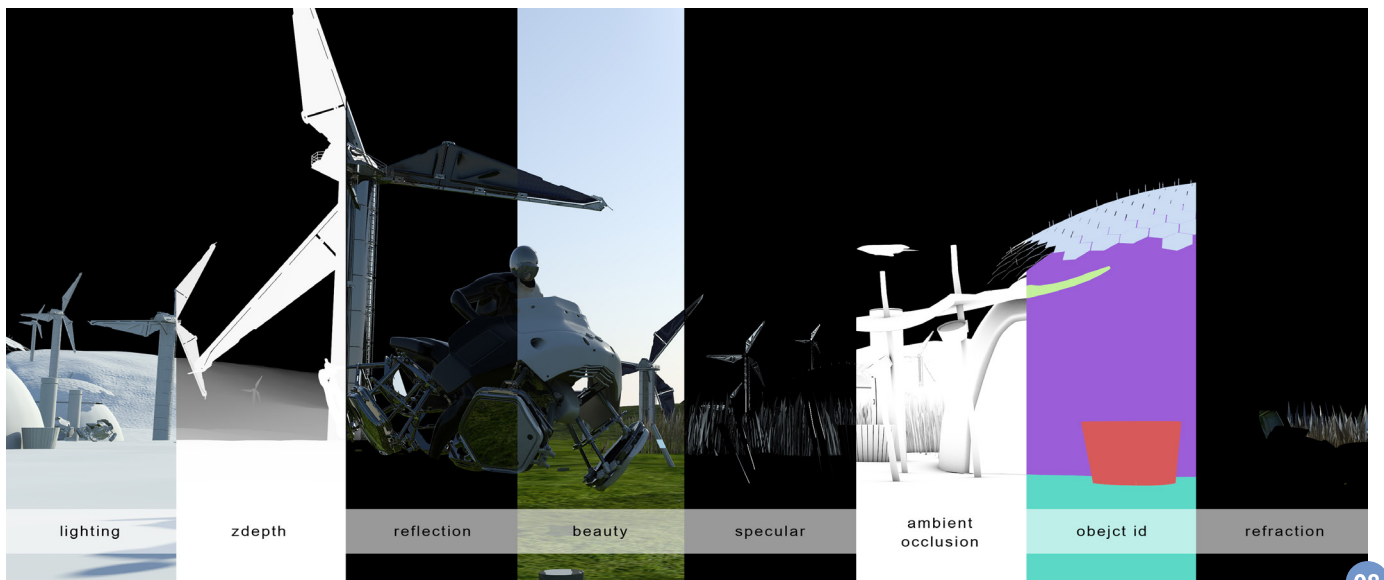
Save up money and invest in a smart phone with the best built in camera you can afford. The resolution and quality of the photos is great nowadays and you take your phone with you everywhere anyway, so why not use it creatively?

Every day (while walking my dog) I take pictures with my phone that I use as references for light moods, material behavior, interesting composition, specific objects, and so on. I also use them as textures in paintings, even as bitmaps in my 3D work. You can also use your phone to 'photo-scan' your sketchbook drawings and further refine them in Photoshop.

Even though at first glance these four images seem similar, the focus in each one changes a lot. Wide lens cameras (28mm or less) create a sense of magnitude, while close-ups (more than 85 mm) create a more intimate atmosphere. I want the driver of the buggy to be the main focus, but

for the viewer to still be able to tell what type of environment she's in.

07 Moving on to painting: Using soft selections and the rotation tool I posed a base mesh for the driver on the buggy. At this



08



09

point I had already blocked in the composition, all major assets, the light setup, and the resulting basic color palette.

Most of the design choices were made but my illustration was still ugly. Which meant that was it for the 3D part. This is my base from which everything else will be refined in Photoshop.

08 Layer cake: If I have enough time, I render my 3D scene in a very high resolution. It's the best excuse for having a lunch break! No painstakingly added details get lost and I have the freedom to crop or downscale the image later on at any time.

I overlaid all the render layers and used them to further describe the setting of *Symbiont World*. For example, with the Z depth pass I could add haze

to the scene, and with the reflection pass I could balance the glossiness of the objects. I was careful not to overdo it as I didn't want my scene to look like the much criticized *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*.

09 Smile for the camera! After the initial composition was done I started adding photos from my travels as textures or whole elements. This was another big step. Everything slowly fell into place. I searched for the photos which strengthened my vision the most. A good example was the photo of the overgrown water tank, which I took in Vietnam.

The right textures also added so much more believability to the scene, and it was a fast way to get rid of the 3D render look. I tried to use pictures with similar perspectives and lighting, so they

would fit naturally. I also replaced the naked hills in the back with images of crop fields I took while visiting Stonehenge in England. ▶

06 These views are 1) too static, 2) too close, 3) too close and intimate and 4) perfect!

07 The final 3D output rendered with mental ray with a daylight system. The ships in the background were rendered separately

08 All the render passes in one image. Some of them are barely used in the final compositing

09 Most of the textures are in place and the image suddenly has a lot more soul



10



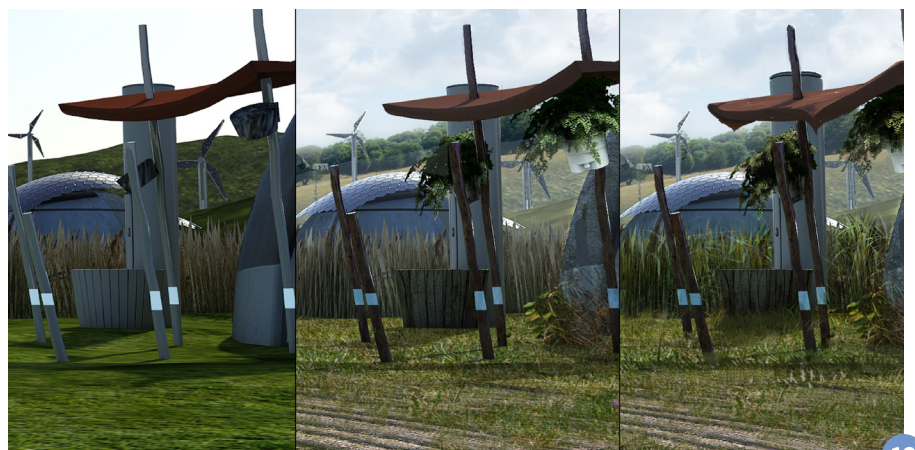
11

10 The to-do list: Often while creating an image I get sidetracked or lost in details. Complex illustrations like this one also take more than one session to finish.

At the top of my layer stack I had a reference layer where I marked ALL the things I wanted to polish in this painting. When I had finished working on a specific marked part of the image I would go back to my 'to do' layer and delete the corresponding marker. It doesn't happen often that erasing something out of your picture feels so good!

This is another self-art directing technique. It also helps for estimating how long it will take to finish a painting.

11 We need a driver: I decided the color for the buggy needs to be orange. It creates a complimentary contrast to the sky, perfect to draw the viewers' attention. Additionally orange is mainly associated with utility vehicles, and not



12

with the military, which is also important. My goal was to create something unique, not a stereotypical military shooter game or action film scenario. Because of that I decided that my driver must be a female protagonist, an intelligent adventurer, eager to explore the unknown, and not a beefed up, trigger-happy, super-soldier.

12 Every blade of grass tells a story: With all the major elements defined, my focus shifted to detailing. In addition to adding the textures, I painted over everything to indicate as much additional information as I could about my world. The pot is surrounded by high grass and the blanket is torn and has tiny holes in it. There



13



14

are no clear pathways leading to the house, and the street is overgrown and the crops look mostly untouched. All of the textured and painted details make the environment look much more rural – tribal even.

13 **What's with the face?** Additional details add believability. I painted a light blue glow around the 'wheels' to make the energy inside the anti gravity plates visible which is more understandable and plausible for the viewer.

After looking at reference images of people riding motorcycles I decided to change the face, so for that I integrated a photo of my girlfriends' face. I reworked her silhouette slightly because it was much harder to capture the elegant and subtle proportions of a woman than a man on canvas without becoming cartoony. The hair also got repainted so it doesn't look as stiff and unrealistic. Oh yeah, and I gave her feet. Everybody could use a pair!

14 **Racing to the finish line:** The image was nearly finished. After taking a long break I looked at it and decided to push the perspective and the storytelling. I reduced unnecessary details in the background and got rid of the house on the left. It didn't look good anyway and most importantly it did not contribute anything relevant.

I added dust and grass dancing behind the buggy in the air to indicate the speed of the vehicle. Even details like the color of her boots matter. At first they were gray and looked too clean and *Star Trek* like; brown boots are much more useful for outdoor activities.

15 **Arrival at Symbiont World:** For the last color correction I merge the whole image. I tried to find a reference image with a similar sky and with the same amount of haze overall; a scene with a lot of flora to nail that look I was aiming for. All the hard work pays off in the

end and the only things left to do were placing the final logo and signature; then go to bed exhausted but happy! ●

10 Create a layer group with a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer with Saturation set to 0 and a new normal layer with red markings

11 Most tasks from the to-do list have been completed but this does not necessarily mean the painting is finished

12 The base render with added textures, color picking and overpainting

13 Faces are natural focal points in most paintings

14 Details like the color of the boots give images extra refinement

The Artist



Przemek Duda


artstation.com/artist/przemek-duda



T W O R L D



P. N. 2014



“These tutorials not only provide interesting exercises for the beginner to help build a strong foundation for drawing and painting, but also provide important insights into the mindset of a concept artist. Very useful and inspiring!”

Lois Van Baarle (aka Loish)

Digital concept artist & animator | loish.net

beginner's guide to digital painting in Photoshop® characters

Following on from the highly successful *Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop*, this latest title explores the popular techniques used in character design.

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting: Characters is a comprehensive guide for artists wishing to create convincing and detailed characters. It features established artists such as Charlie Bowater (concept artist at Atomhawk) and Derek Stenning (freelance concept artist and illustrator, with clients including Marvel Entertainment and Nintendo) who share their industry experiences by covering such aspects as posing characters, choosing the correct costumes, conveying emotions, and creating suitable moods.

Comprehensive step-by-step instructions – plus a quick tips section demonstrating how to paint elements that are integral to character design and a glossary covering essential Photoshop tools – make this an invaluable resource for those looking to learn new skills, as well as those pursuing the next level.

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DIGITAL ART MASTER:

Montiel Battle 1369 aftermath

by José Daniel Cabrera Peña

See how the painting master developed his award winning image 'Montiel Battle 1369 aftermath' using Photoshop and Nik Color Efex Pro 3 ▶



The Artist



**José Daniel
Cabrera Peña**

joscabrera.blogspot.com.es

Software Used:
Photoshop

José Daniel Cabrera Peña is a self taught traditional and CG artist. He creates historical, fantasy and sci-fi inspired illustrations, matte painting and concept art for games and animations. project since 2011.

This image illustrates the battle that took place under the castle of Montiel during the civil war of Castile in 1369. It was part of the Hundred Years War in which French and English monarchs sent troops to fight for the sovereignty of Castile, now part of Spain.

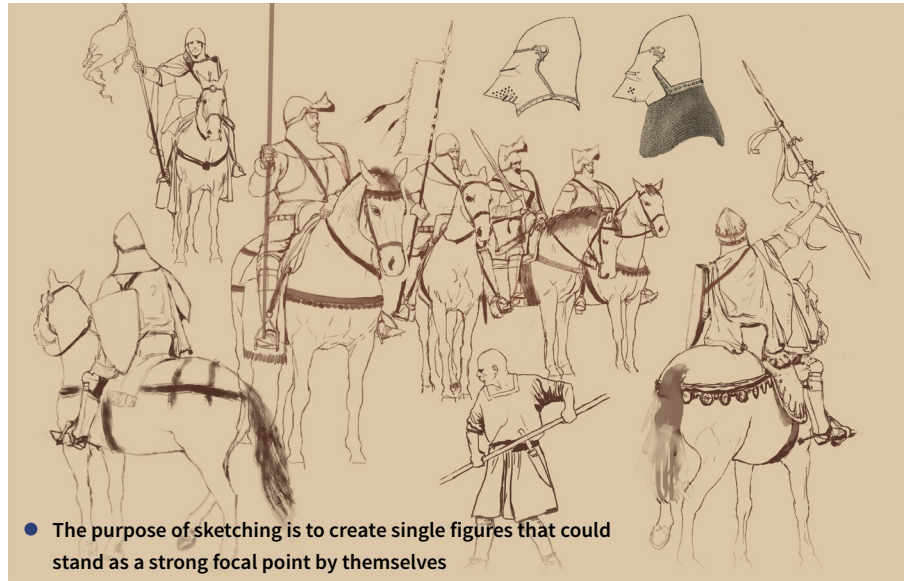
The most interesting thing I wanted to show was the diversity of the transitional armor that was used during the second half of that century. From an artistic point of view, the challenge was to bring the Spanish sun light to the scene and to show all the bright heraldry colors without creating a pop art effect.

The main purpose of the historical illustration is to give the readers a glimpse of the historical context and offer a whole impression of the period which is as accurate as possible.

As well as historical accuracy, proper lighting, color and artistry can also create the feel of authenticity, creating an enjoyable experience for the audience.

Historical reference gathering and sketches

I began by researching the period and the historical events I was depicting. Something I didn't want to miss here were the figures of



- The purpose of sketching is to create single figures that could stand as a strong focal point by themselves

Bertrand du Guesclin, the general of the French White Company of mercenaries, and his coat of arms depicting a red mark over a two headed black eagle, as well as the Castilian monarch Enrique de Trastámara.

Also, a variety of bascinet helmet shapes with different visors could not be missed. Transitional armor is a central element of this illustration.

On top of this I made a deep study of Spanish funerary effigies to try to get a sense of the local fashion taste, rather than just of fourteenth-century European knights more generally.

Setting the mood and base colors

It was now time to set the mood of the scene and define the background color. Doing this before coloring the main characters is the easiest way to

- Work out a very basic composition with a cavalry parade gathering after the battle to depict the aftermath



blend the characters with the background and to establish the color palette for the characters.

This is also key to building solid coloring for metal materials. The polished armor reflects the surrounding colors creating a miniature landscape with its surface, including sky, skyline and ground. At this stage I worked with traditional looking brushes to add a bit of texture (Fig. 2a).

I wanted to create a strong backlight and highly illuminated, almost opaque, fog-like feel so the far background colors will be a wash of gray tones. This is probably the hardest thing to understand about color, as color variations are very subtle and only detectable by color contrast when two or more tones are seen together. I would just use something like photographs as reference to get the right mood.

Detail rendering and brush finish

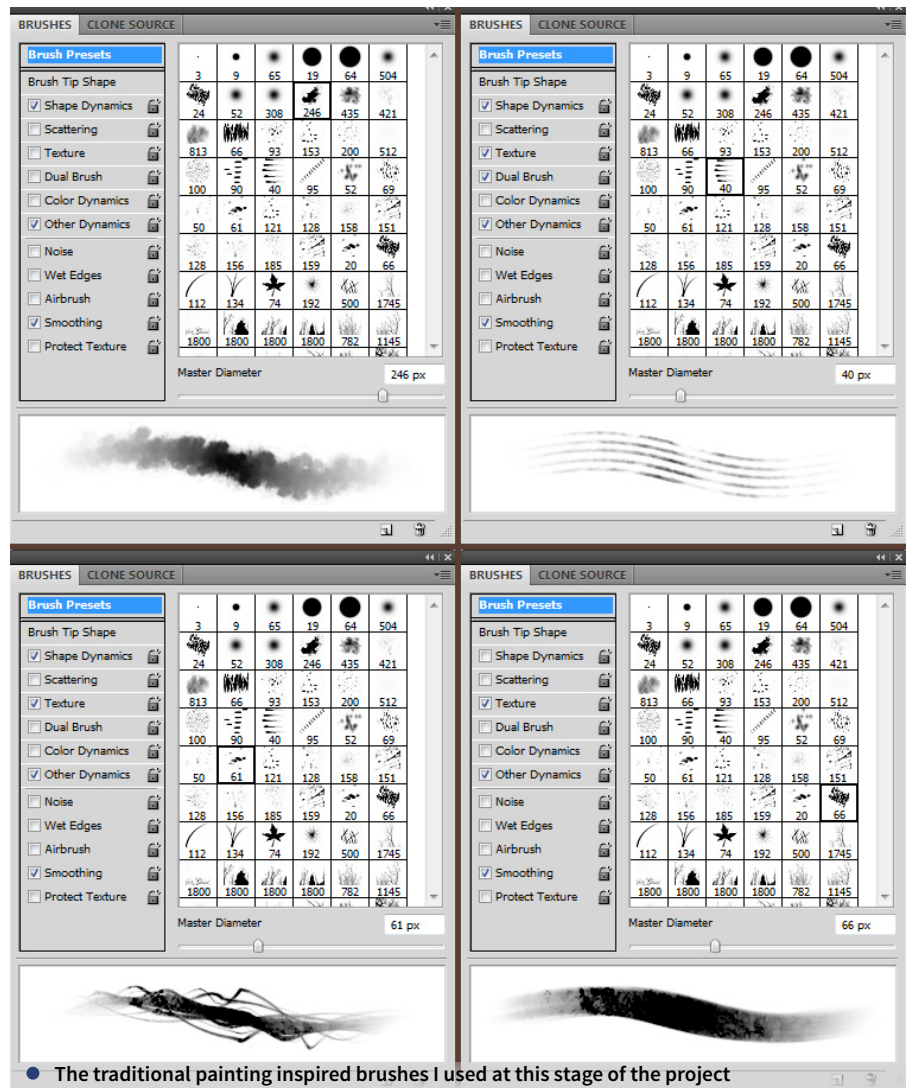
I took a break after each four or five hours of work to test post production alternatives and figure out what I would be doing in the final stages to make sure I was heading in the right direction.

After doing a color base under the figures, I did a thick color covering to mask the line and polish the detail on top of the figure drawings. This is like a sandwich: color base under the drawing, line drawing and color covering for polishing and details (Fig. 3a).

The brushes I chose were simple and as primitive as possible to help to create visual consistency. Chainmail textures were created using an Overlay layer though.

Correcting atmosphere and final decisions

Now everything is in place, we can start adding layers of atmosphere to help create depth between near and distant elements. I do this with all kinds of blending modes applied to new thin atmosphere layers and graduating them from



the layer style options in Photoshop. This way you can control transparency from both black and white tones (Fig. 4a). Color burn, Screen, and Soft Light and so on; each and every one of the blending modes are also useful.

It is important not to turn the sky completely white, because of the image being for a magazine which means that the colors could easily fade

and be lost. In this particular painting, I wanted to distort the distant colors in order to create atmosphere.

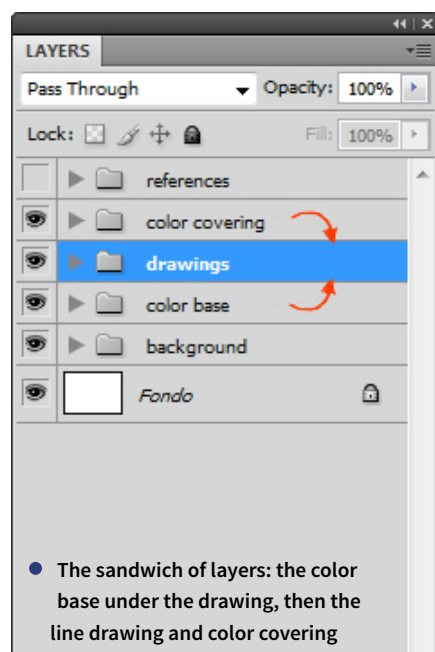
It was a real pain because the base colors I used from the beginning weren't quite right for the hot, dry environment that I wanted. So I ran towards the Nik Color Efex Pro 3 plugin to experiment with the filters (Fig. 4b). This is when the real challenge ▶

- **Painting the background base colors and details. The main shape of the figures remains as backlight reference**



- **Rough brush strokes are enough to define the color base for the main figures. I do this in a layer beneath the line sketch layer**





- Post-production check with the basic color scheme. The goal was to achieve a warmer light and a rather dry environment



- Color covering that masks the line and completes the detail for the figure



began because until now, the atmosphere wasn't quite right.

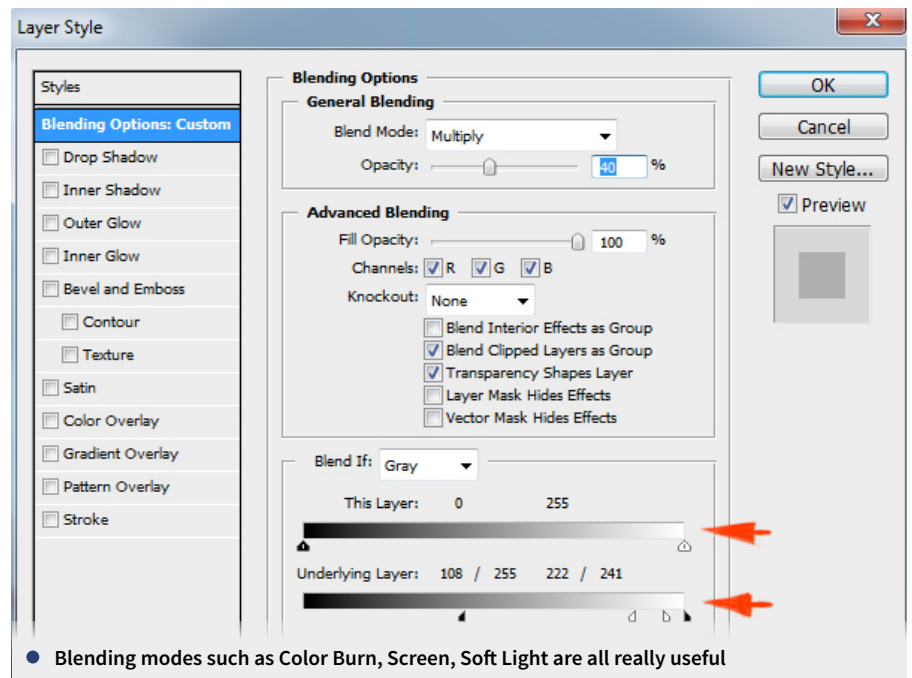
Conclusion

I reached the final stage in the creative process without having solved all the main challenges this painting posed, which made the image one of the hardest post-production processes of my career so far, complete with self-doubt and a lot of backtracking.

In the end, I came to realize the importance of seeking the final mood from the beginning as opposed to trying to create overall color balance and hoping to achieve the desired effect at the end. The search for the mood must be part of the entire process.

On the other hand, as professionals we can't allow a creative process to lead to a dead end, every piece has to be solved by any means.

As a freelancer a single failed commission will immediately lead to a lost client. So, putting any process errors aside, I have to say the problems



were ultimately solved and the painting was successful, earning the history magazine editor's approval, the 3dtotal/Layerpaint excellence

award, and winning the CGHub gold award, as well as being an editor's pick and top image of the week. ●

- Change the wet colors for warm and dry colors with Nik Effex filters and using the layer blending options extensively



The Artist



**José Daniel
Cabrera Peña**

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